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FOLL



ILL.



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THE

BRAMLEIGHS OF BISHOP'S FOLLY.

BY

CHARLES LEVER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.
1868.

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TO

ALEXANDER WILLIAM KINGLAKE, ESQ.,

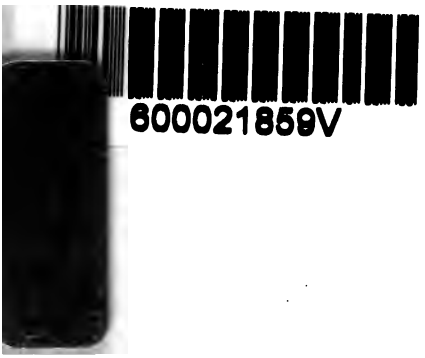
M.P., &c., &c.

My dear Kinglake,

If you should ever turn over these pages, I have no greater wish than that they might afford you a tithe of the pleasure I have derived from your own writings. But I will not ask you to read me, but to believe that I am, in all sincerity, your devoted admirer, for both your genius and your courage, and your attached friend,

CHARLES LEVER.

Trieste, August 31st.


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and contemptuously indifferent to what the world might say of him.

He had passed many years in Italy, and had formed a great attachment to that country. He liked the people and their mode of life; he liked the old cities, so rich in art treasures and so teeming with associations of a picturesque past; and he especially liked their villa architecture, which seemed so essentially suited to a grand and costly style of living. The great reception-rooms, spacious and lofty; the ample antechambers, made for crowds of attendants; and the stairs wide enough for even equipages to ascend them. No more striking illustration of his capricious turn of mind need be given than the fact that it was his pleasure to build one of these magnificent edifices in an Irish county!—a costly whim, obliging him to bring over from Italy a whole troop of stucco-men and painters, men skilled in fresco-work and carving—an extravagance on which he spent thousands. Nor did he live to witness the completion of his splendid mansion.

After his death the building gradually fell into decay. His heirs, not improbably, little caring for a project which had engulfed so large a share of their

fortune, made no efforts to arrest the destroying influences of time and climate, and "Bishop's Folly" —for such was the name given to it by the country-people—soon became a ruin. In some places the roof had fallen in, the doors and windows had all been carried away by the peasants, and in many a cabin or humble shealing in the county around slabs of coloured marble or fragments of costly carving might be met with, over which the skill of a cunning workman had been bestowed for days long. The mansion stood on the side of a mountain which sloped gradually to the sea. The demesne, well wooded, but with young timber, was beautifully varied in surface, one deep glen running, as it were, from the very base of the house to the beach, and showing glimpses, through the trees, of a bright and rapid river tumbling onward to the sea. Seen in its dilapidation and decay, the aspect of the place was dreary and depressing, and led many to wonder how the bishop could ever have selected such a spot; for it was not only placed in the midst of a wild mountain region, but many miles away from anything that could be called a neighbourhood. But the same haughty defiance he gave the world in other things urged him

here to show that he cared little for the judgments which might be passed upon him, or even for the circumstances which would have influenced other men. "When it is my pleasure to receive company, I shall have my house full, no matter where I live," was his haughty speech, and certainly the whole character of his life went to confirm his words.

Some question of disputed title, after the bishop's death, threw the estate into Chancery, and so it remained till, by the operation of the new law touching encumbered property, it became marketable, and was purchased by a rich London banker, who had declared his intention of coming to live upon it.

That any one rich enough to buy such a property, able to restore such a costly house, and maintain a style of living proportionate to its pretensions, could come to reside in the solitude and obscurity of an Irish county, seemed all but impossible, and when the matter became assured by the visit of a well-known architect, and afterwards by the arrival of a troop of workmen, the puzzle then became to guess how it chanced that the great head of a rich banking firm, the chairman of this, the director of that, the promoter of heaven knows what scores of industrial

schemes for fortune, should withdraw from the great bustle of life to accept an existence of complete oblivion.

In the little village of Portshandon — which straggled along the beach, and where, with a few exceptions, none but fishermen and their families lived,—this question was hotly debated; an old half-pay lieutenant, who by courtesy was called captain, being at the head of those who first denied the possibility of the Bramleighs coming at all, and when that matter was removed beyond a doubt, next taking his stand on the fact that nothing short of some disaster in fortune, or some aspersion on character, could ever have driven a man out of the great world to finish his days in the exile of Ireland.

"I suppose you'll give in at last, Captain Craufurd," said Mrs. Bayley, the postmistress of Portshandon, as she pointed to a pile of letters and newspapers, all addressed to "Castello," and which more than quadrupled the other correspondence of the locality.

"I didn't pretend they were not coming, Mrs. Bayley," said he, in the cracked and cantankerous tone he invariably spoke in. "I simply observed

that I'd be thankful for any one telling me why they were coming. That's the puzzle,—why they're coming?"

"I suppose because they like it, and they can afford it," said she, with a toss of her head.

"Like it!" cried he, in derision. "Like it! Look out of the window there beside you, Mrs. Bayley, and say, isn't it a lovely prospect, that beggarly village, and the old rotten boats, keel uppermost, with the dead fish and the oyster-shells, and the torn nets, and the dirty children? Isn't it an elegant sight after Hyde Park and the Queen's palace?"

"I never saw the Queen's palace nor the other place you talk of, but I think there's worse towns to live in than Portshandon."

"And do they think they'll make it better by calling it Castello?" said he, as with a contemptuous gesture he threw from him one of the newspapers with this address. "If they want to think they're in Italy they ought to come down here in November with the Channel fogs sweeping up through the mountains, and the wind beating the rain against the windows. I hope they'll think they're in Naples.

Why can't they call the place by the name we all know it by? It was Bishop's Folly when I was a boy, and it will be Bishop's Folly after I'm dead."

"I suppose people can call their house whatever they like? Nobody objects to your calling your place Craufurd's Lea."

"I'd like to see them object to it," cried he, fiercely. "It's Craufurd's Lea in Digge's *Survey of Down*, 1714. It's Craufurd's Lea in the *Anthologia Hibernica*, and it's down, too, in Joyce's *Irish Fisheries;* and we were Craufurds of Craufurd's Lea before one stone of that big barrack up there was laid, and maybe we'll be so after it's a ruin again."

"I hope it's not going to be a ruin any more, Captain Craufurd, all the same," said the post-mistress, tartly, for she was not disposed to under-value the increased importance the neighbourhood was about to derive from the rich family coming to live in it.

"Well, there's one thing I can tell you, Mrs. Bayley," said he, with his usual grin. "The devil a bit of Ireland they'd ever come to, if they could live in England. Mind my words, and see if they'll not come true. It's either the Bank is in a bad way, or

this or that company is going to smash, or it's his wife has run away, or one of the daughters married the footman;—something or other has happened, you'll see, or we would never have the honour of their distinguished company down here."

"It's a bad wind blows nobody good," said Mrs. Bayley. "It's luck for us, anyhow."

"I don't perceive the luck of it either, ma'am," said the captain, with increased peevishness. "Chickens will be eighteenpence a couple, eggs a halfpenny a piece. I'd like to know what you'll pay for a codfish, such as I bought yesterday for fourpence?"

"It's better for them that has to sell them."

"Ay, but I'm talking of them that has to buy them, ma'am, and I'm thinking how a born gentleman with a fixed income is to compete with one of these fellows that gets his gold from California at market price, and makes more out of one morning's robbery on the Stock Exchange, than a Lieutenant-General receives after thirty years' service."

A sharp tap at the window-pane interrupted the discussion at this critical moment, and Mrs. Bayley perceived it was Mr. Dorose, Colonel Bramleigh's

valet, who had come for the letters for the Great House."

"Only these, Mrs. Bayley?" said he, half contemptuously.

"Well, indeed, sir; it's a good-sized bundle after all. There's eleven letters, and about fifteen papers and two books."

"Send them all on to Brighton, Mrs. Bayley. We shall not come down here till the end of the month. Just give me *The Times*, however;" and tearing open the cover, he turned to the City article. "I hope you've nothing in Ecuadors, Mrs. Bayley? they look shaky. I'm 'hit,' too, in my Turks. I see no dividend this half." Here he leaned forward, so as to whisper in her ear, and said, "Whenever you want a snug thing, Mrs. B., you're always safe with Brazilians;" and with this he moved off, leaving the postmistress in a flurry of shame and confusion as to what precise character of transaction his counsel applied.

"Upon my conscience, we're come to a pretty pass!" exclaimed the captain, as, buttoning his coat, he issued forth into the street; nor was his temper much improved by finding the way blocked up by a

string of carts and drays, slowly proceeding towards the great house, all loaded with furniture and kitchen utensils, and the other details of a large household. A bystander remarked that four saddle-horses had passed through at daybreak, and one of the grooms had said, "It was nothing to what was coming in a few days."

Two days after this, and quite unexpectedly by all, the village awoke to see a large flag waving from the flagstaff over the chief tower of Castello; and the tidings were speedily circulated that the great people had arrived. A few sceptics, determining to decide the point for themselves, set out to go up to the house; but the lodge gate was closed, and the gate-keeper answered them from behind it, saying that no visitors were to be admitted; a small incident, in its way, but after all, it is by small incidents that men speculate on the tastes and tempers of a new dynasty.

CHAPTER II.

LADY AUGUSTA'S LETTER.

It will save some time, both to writer and reader, while it will also serve to explain certain particulars about those we are interested in, if I give in this place a letter which was written by Lady Augusta Bramleigh, the Colonel's young wife, to a married sister at Rome. It ran thus:—

"Hanover Square, Nov. 10, 18—

"Dearest Dorothy,—

"Here we are back in town, at a season, too, when we find ourselves the only people left; and if I wanted to make a long story of how it happens, there is the material; but it is precisely what I desire to avoid, and at the risk of being barely intelligible, I will be brief. We have left Earlshope, and, indeed, Herefordshire, for good. Our campaign there was a social failure, but just such a failure as I predicted it

would and must be; and although, possibly, I might have liked to have been spared some of the mortifications we met with, I am too much pleased with the results to quarrel over the means.

"You are already in possession of what we intended by the purchase of Earlshope—how we meant to become county magnates, marry our sons and daughters to neighbouring magnates, and live as though we had been rooted to the soil for centuries. I say 'we,' my dear, because I am too good a wife to separate myself from Col. B. in all these projects; but I am fain to own that as I only saw defeat in the plan, I opposed it from the first. Here, in town, money will do anything; at least, anything that one has any right to do. There may be a set or a clique to which it will not give admission; but who wants them, who needs them?

"There's always a wonderful Van Eyck or a Memling in a Dutch town, to obtain the sight of which you have to petition the authorities, or implore the Stadtholder; but I never knew any one admit that success repaid the trouble; and the chances are that you come away from the sight fully convinced that you have seen scores of old pictures exactly like

it, and that all that could be said was, it was as brown and as dusky, and as generally disappointing, as its fellows. So it is with these small exclusive societies. It may be a great triumph of ingenuity to pick the lock; but there's nothing in the coffer to reward it. I repeat, then, with money—and we had money—London was open to us. All the more, too, that for some years back society has taken a speculative turn; and it is nothing derogatory to find people 'to go in,' as it is called, for a good thing, in 'Turks' or 'Brazilians,' in patent fuel, or a new loan to the children of Egypt. To these, and such like, your City man and banker is esteemed a safe pilot; and you would be amused at the amount of attention Col. B. was accustomed to meet with from men who regarded themselves as immeasurably above him, and who, all question of profit apart, would have hesitated at admitting him to their acquaintance.

"I tell you all these very commonplace truths, my dear Dorothy, because they may not, indeed cannot be such truisms to you—you, who live in a grand old city, with noble traditions, and the refinements that come transmitted from centuries of high habits; and I feel, as I write, how puzzled you will

often be to follow me. London was, as I have twice said, our home; but for that very reason we could not be content with it. Earlshope, by ill luck, was for sale, and we bought it. I am afraid to tell you the height of our castle-building; but, as we were all engaged, the work went on briskly, every day adding at least a story to the edifice. We were to start as high-sheriff, then represent the county. I am not quite clear, I think we never settled the point, as to the lord-lieutenancy; but I know the exact way, and the very time, in which we demanded our peerage. How we threatened to sulk, and did sulk; how we actually sat a whole night on the back benches; and how we made our eldest son dance twice with a daughter of the 'Opposition,'—menaces that no intelligent Cabinet or conscientious 'Whip' could for a moment misunderstand. And oh! my dear Dora, as I write these things, how forcibly I feel the prudence of that step which once we all were so ready to condemn you for having taken. You were indeed right to marry a foreigner. That an English girl should address herself to the married life of England, the first condition is she should never have left England, not even for that holiday-trip to Paris and Switzerland,

which people now do, as once they were wont to 'do Margate.' The whole game of existence is such a scramble with us: we scramble for social rank, for place, for influence, for Court favour, for patronage; and all these call for so much intrigue and plotting, that I vow to you I'd as soon be a Carbonara or a Sanfedista as the wife of an aspiring middle-class Englishman.

"But to return. The county would not have us —we were rich, and we were City folk, and they deemed it an unpardonable pretension in us to come down amongst them. They refused our invitations, and sent us none of their own. We split with them, contested the election against them, and got beaten. We spent unheard-of moneys, and bribed everybody that had not a vote for ten miles round. With universal suffrage, which I believe we promised them, we should have been at the head of the poll; but the freeholders were to a man opposed to us.

"I am told that our opponents behaved ungenerously and unjustly—perhaps they did; at all events, the end of the contest left us without a single acquaintance, and we stood alone in our glory of beaten candidateship, after three months of unheard-

of fatigue, and more meanness than I care to mention. The end of all was, to shake the dust off our feet at Herefordshire, and advertise Earlshope for sale. Meanwhile we returned to town; just as shipwrecked men clamber up the first rock in sight, not feeling in their danger what desolation is before them. I take it that the generals of a beaten army talk very little over their late defeat. At all events we observed a most scrupulous reserve, and I don't think that a word was dropped amongst us for a month that could have led a stranger to believe that we had just been beaten in an election, and hunted out of the county.

"I was just beginning to feel that our lesson, a severe one, it is true, might redound to our future benefit, when our eldest-born,—I call them all mine, Dora, though not one of them will say mamma to me,—discovered that there was an Irish estate to be sold, with a fine house and fine grounds, and that if we couldn't be great folk in the grander kingdom, there was no saying what we might not be in the smaller one. This was too much for me. I accepted the Herefordshire expedition because it smacked of active service. I knew well we should be defeated,

and I knew there would be a battle, but I could not consent to banishment. What had I done, I asked myself over and over, that I should be sent to live in Ireland?

"I tried to get up a party against the project, and failed. Augustus Bramleigh—our heir—was in its favour, indeed its chief promoter. Temple, the second son, who is a secretary of embassy, and the most insufferable of puppies, thought it a 'nice place for us,' and certain to save us money; and John—Jack, they call him—who is in the navy, thinks land to be land, besides that, he was once stationed at Cork, and thought it a paradise. If I could do little with the young men, I did less with the girls. Marion, the eldest, who deems her papa a sort of divine-right head of a family, would not discuss the scheme; and Eleanor, who goes in for nature and spontaneous feeling, replied that she was overjoyed at the thought of Ireland, and even half gave me to understand that she was only sorry it was not Africa. I was thus driven to a last resource. I sent for our old friend, Doctor Bartlet, and told him frankly that he must order me abroad to a dry warm climate, where there were few changes of temperature, and

nothing depressing in the air. He did the thing to perfection; he called in Forbes to consult with him. The case was very serious, he said. The lung was not yet attacked, but the bronchial tubes were affected. Oh, how grateful I felt to my dear bronchial tubes, for they have sent me to Italy. Yes, Dolly dearest, I am off on Wednesday, and hope within a week after this reaches you to be at your side, pouring out all my sorrows, and asking for that consolation you never yet refused me. And now, to be eminently practical, can you obtain for me that beautiful little villa that overlooked the Borghese Gardens—it was called the Villino Altieri. The old Prince Giuseppe Altieri, who used to be an adorer of mine, if he be alive may like to resume his ancient passion, and accept me for a tenant; all the more that I can afford to be liberal. Col. B. behaves well always where money enters. I shall want servants, as I only mean to take from this, Rose and my groom. You know the sort of creatures I like; but, for any sake, be particular about the cook—I can't eat 'Romanesque'—and if there be a stray Frenchman wandering about, secure him. Do you remember dear old Paoletti, Dolly, who used to serve up those

delicious little maccaroni suppers long ago in our own room?—cheating us into gourmandism by the trick of deceit! Oh, what would I give to be as young again! To be soaring up to heaven, as I listened with closed eyes to the chaunt in the Sistine Chapel, or ascending to another elysium of delight, as I gazed at the 'noble guard' of the Pope, who, while his black charger was caracolling, and he was holding on by the mane, yet managed to dart towards me such a look of love and devotion! and you remember, Dolly, we lived 'secondo piano,' at the time, and it was plucky of the man, considering how badly he rode. I yearn to go back there. I yearn for those sunsets from the Pincian, and those long rambling rides over the Campagna, leading to nothing but an everlasting dreaminess, and an intense desire that one could go on day after day in the same delicious life of unreality; for it is so, Dolly. Your Roman existence is as much a trance as anything ever was—not a sight nor sound to shock it. The swell of the organ and the odour of the incense follow you even to your pleasures, and, just as the light streams in through the painted windows with its radiance of gold and amber and rose, so does the Church tinge

with its mellow lustre all that goes on within its shadow. And how sweet and soothing it all is. I don't know, I cannot know, if it lead to heaven, but it certainly goes in that direction, so far as peace of mind is concerned. What has become of Carlo Lambruschini? is he married? How good-looking he was, and how he sung. I never heard Mario without thinking of him. How is it that our people never have that velvety softness in their tenor voices; there is no richness, no latent depth of tone, and consequently no power of expression? Will his Eminence of the Palazzo Antinori know me again? I was only a child when he saw me last, and used to give me his 'benedizione.' Be sure you bespeak for me the same condescending favour again, Heretic though I be. Don't be shocked, dearest Dora, but I mean to be half converted, that is, to have a sort of serious flirtation with the Church; something that is to touch my affections, and yet not wound my principles; something that will surround me with all the fervour of the faith, and yet not ask me to sign the ordinances. I hope I can do this. I eagerly hope it, for it will supply a void in my heart which certainly neither the money article, nor the share

list, nor even the details of a county contest, have sufficed to fill. Where is poor little Santa Rosa and his guitar? I want them, Dolly—I want them both. His little tinkling barcaroles were as pleasant as the drip of a fountain on a sultry night; and am I not a highly imaginative creature, who can write of a sultry night in this land of fog, east wind, gust, and gas-light. How my heart bounds to think how soon I shall leave it. How I could travesty the refrain, and cry, 'Rendez moi mon passeport, ou laissez moi mourir.' And now, Dolly, darling, I have done. Secure me the villa, engage my people. Tanti saluti to the dear cardinal,—as many loves to all who are kind enough to remember me. Send me a lascia-passare for my luggage—it is voluminous—to the care of the consul at Civita Vecchia, and tell him to look out for me by the arrival of the French boat, somewhere about the 20th or 21st; he can be useful with the custom-house creatures, and obtain me a carriage all to myself in the train.

"It is always more 'carino' to talk of a husband at the last line of a letter, and so I say, give dear Tino all my loves, quite apart and distinct from my other legacies of the like nature. Tell him, I am

more tolerant than I used to be—he will know my meaning—that I make paper cigarettes just as well, and occasionally, when in high good-humour, even condescend to smoke one too. Say also, that I have a little chestnut cob, quiet enough for his riding, which shall be always at his orders; that he may dine with me every Sunday, and have one dish—I know well what it will be, I smell the garlic of it even now—of his own dictating; and if these be not enough, add that he may make love to me during the whole of Lent; and with this, believe me

"Your own doating sister,

"AUGUSTA BRAMLEIGH."

"After much thought and many misgivings I deemed it advisable to offer to take one of the girls with me, leaving it open, to mark my indifference as to which it should be. They both, however, refused, and to my intense relief, declared that they did not care to come abroad; Augustus also protesting that it was a plan he could not approve of. The diplomatist alone opined that the project had anything to recommend it; but as his authority, like my own, in the family, carries little weight, we were happily

outvoted. I have, therefore, the supreme satisfaction —and is it not such?—of knowing that I have done the right thing, and it has cost me nothing; like those excellent people who throw very devout looks towards heaven, without the remotest desire to be there."

CHAPTER III.

"THE EVENING AFTER A HARD RUN."

It was between eight and nine o'clock of a wintry evening near Christmas; a cold drizzle of rain was falling, which on the mountains might have been snow, as Mr. Drayton, the butler at the Great House, as Castello was called in the village, stood austerely with his back to the fire in the dining-room, and as he surveyed the table, wondered within himself what could possibly have detained the young gentlemen so late. The hounds had met that day about eight miles off, and Colonel Bramleigh had actually put off dinner half-an-hour for them, but to no avail; and now Mr. Drayton, whose whole personal arrangements for the evening had been so thoughtlessly interfered with, stood there musing over the wayward nature of youth, and inwardly longing for the time when, retiring from active service, he should enjoy

the ease and indulgence his long life of fatigue and hardship had earned.

"They're coming now, Mr. Drayton," said a livery-servant, entering hastily. "George saw the light of their cigars as they came up the avenue."

"Bring in the soup, then, at once, and send George here with another log for the fire. There'll be no dressing for dinner to-day, I'll be bound;" and imparting a sort of sarcastic bitterness to his speech, he filled himself a glass of sherry at the sideboard and tossed it off—only just in time, for the door opened, and a very noisy, merry party of four entered the room, and made for the fire.

"As soon as you like, Drayton," said Augustus, the eldest Bramleigh, a tall, good-looking, but somewhat stern-featured man of about eight-and-twenty. The second, Temple Bramleigh, was middle-sized, with a handsome but somewhat over-delicate-looking face, to which a simpering affectation of imperturbable self-conceit gave a sort of puppyism; while the youngest, Jack, was a bronzed, bright-eyed, fine-looking fellow, manly, energetic, and determined, but with a sweetness when he smiled and showed his

good teeth that implied a soft and very impressionable nature. They were all in scarlet coats, and presented a group strikingly good-looking and manly. The fourth of the party was, however, so eminently handsome, and so superior in expression as well as lineament, that the others seemed almost vulgar beside him. He was in black coat and cords, a checked cravat seeming to indicate that he was verging, so far as he might, on the limits of hunting costume; for George L'Estrange was in orders, and the curate of the parish in which Castello stood. It is not necessary to detain the reader by any lengthened narrative of the handsome young parson. Enough to say, that it was not all from choice he had entered the Church,—narrow fortune, and the hope of a small family living, deciding him to adopt a career which to one who had a passion for field-sports seemed the very last to gratify his tastes. As a horseman he was confessedly the first in the country round; although his one horse—he was unable to keep a second—condemned him to rare appearance at the meets. The sight of the parson and his black mare, Nora Creina, in the field, were treated with a cheer, for he was a universal favourite, and if a general suffrage

could have conferred the episcopate, George would have had his mitre many a day ago.

So sure a seat and so perfect a hand needed never to have wanted a mount. There was not a man with a stable who would not have been well pleased to see his horse ridden by such a rider; but L'Estrange declined all such offers—a sensitive fear of being called a hunting parson deterred him; indeed it was easy to see by the rarity with which he permitted himself the loved indulgence, what a struggle he maintained between will and temptation, and how keenly he felt the sacrifice he imposed upon himself.

Such, in brief, was the party who were now seated at table, well pleased to find themselves in presence of an admirable dinner, in a room replete with every comfort. The day's run, of course, formed the one topic of their talk, and a great deal of merriment went on about the sailor-like performances of Jack, who had been thrown twice, but on the whole acquitted himself creditably, and had taken one high bank so splendidly as to win a cheer from all who saw him.

"I wish you had not asked that poor Frenchman to follow you, Jack," said Augustus; "he was really

riding very nicely till he came to that unlucky fence."

"I only cried out, 'Venez donc, monsieur,' and when I turned my head, after clearing the bank, I saw his horse with his legs in the air and monsieur underneath."

"When I picked him up," broke in L'Estrange, "he said, 'Merci mille fois, monsieur,' and then fainted off, the poor fellow's face actually wearing the smile of courtesy he had got up to thank me."

"Why will Frenchmen try things that are quite out of their beat?" said Jack,

"That's a most absurd prejudice of yours, Master Jack," cried the diplomatist. "Frenchmen ride admirably, nowadays. I've seen a steeplechase in Normandy, over as stiff a course, and as well ridden as ever Leicestershire witnessed."

"Yes, yes; I've heard all that," said the sailor, "just as I've heard that their iron fleet is as good, if not better than our own."

"I think our own newspapers rather hint that," said L'Estrange.

"They do more," said Temple; "they prove it. They show a numerical superiority in ships, and they

give an account of guns, and weight of metal dead against us."

"I'll not say anything of the French; but this much I will say," cried the sailor; "the question will have to be settled one of these days, and I'm right glad to think that it cannot be done by writers in newspapers."

"May I come in?" cried a soft voice; and a very pretty head, with long fair ringlets, appeared at the door.

"Yes. Come by all means," said Jack; "perhaps we shall be able, by your help, to talk of something besides fighting Frenchmen."

While he spoke, L'Estrange had risen, and approached to shake hands with her.

"Sit down with us, Nelly," said Augustus, "or George will get no dinner."

"Give me a chair, Drayton," said she; and, turning to her brother, added, "I only came in to ask some tidings about an unlucky foreigner; the servants have it he was cruelly hurt, some think hopelessly."

"There's the culprit who did the mischief," said Temple, pointing to Jack; "let him recount his feat."

"I'm not to blame in the least, Nelly. I took a smashing high bank, and the little Frenchman tried to follow me and came to grief."

"Ay, but you challenged him to come on," said Temple. "Now, Master Jack, people don't do that sort of thing in the hunting-field."

"I said, 'Come along, monsieur,' to give him pluck. I never thought for a moment he was to suffer for it."

"But is he seriously hurt?" asked she.

"I think not," said L'Estrange; "he seemed to me more stunned than actually injured. Fortunately for him they had not far to take him, for the disaster occurred quite close to Duckett's Wood, where he is stopping."

"Is he at Longworth's?" asked Augustus.

"Yes. Longworth met him up the Nile, and they travelled together for some months, and when they parted, it was agreed they were to meet here at Christmas; and though Longworth had written to apprise his people they were coming, he has not appeared himself, and the Frenchman is waiting patiently for his host's arrival."

"And laming his best horse in the meanwhile.

That dark bay will never do another day with hounds," said Temple.

"She was shaky before, but she is certainly not the better of this day's work. I'd blister her, and turn her out for a full year," said Augustus.

"I suppose that's another of those things in which the French are our superiors," muttered Jack, "but I suspect, I'd think twice about it before I'd install myself in a man's house, and ride his horses in his absence."

"It was the host's duty to be there to receive him," said Temple, who was always on the watch to make the sailor feel how little he knew of society and its ways.

"I hope when you've finished your wine," said Ellen, "you'll not steal off to bed, as you did the other night, without ever appearing in the drawing-room."

"L'Estrange shall go, at all events," cried Augustus. "The church shall represent the laity."

"I'm not in trim to enter a drawing-room, Miss Bramleigh," said the curate, blushing. "I wouldn't dare to present myself in such a costume."

"I declare," said Jack, "I think it becomes you better than your Sunday rig; don't you, Nelly?"

"Papa will be greatly disappointed, Mr. L'Estrange, if he should not see you," said she, rising to leave the room; "he wants to hear all about your day's sport, and especially about that poor Frenchman. Do you know his name?"

"Yes, here's his card;—Anatole de Pracontal."

"A good name," said Temple, "but the fellow himself looks a snob."

"I call that very hard," said Jack, "to say what any fellow looks like when he is covered with slush and dirt, his hat smashed, and his mouth full of mud."

"Don't forget that we expect to see you," said Ellen, with a nod and a smile, to the curate, and left the room.

"And who or what is Mr. Longworth?" said Temple.

"I never met him. All I know is, that he owns that very ugly red-brick house, with the three gables in front, on the hill-side as you go towards Newry," said Augustus.

"I think I can tell you something about him,"

said the parson; "his father was my grandfather's agent. I believe he began as his steward, when we had property in this county; he must have been a shrewd sort of man, for he raised himself from a very humble origin to become a small estated proprietor and justice of the peace; and when he died, about four years ago, he left Philip Longworth something like a thousand a year in landed property, and some ready money besides."

"And this Longworth, as you call him,—what is he like?"

"A good sort of fellow, who would be better if he was not possessed by a craving ambition to know fine people, and move in their society. Not being able to attain the place he aspires to in his own county, he has gone abroad, and affects to have a horror of English life and ways, the real grievance being his own personal inability to meet acceptance in a certain set. This is what I hear of him; my own knowledge is very slight. I have ever found him well-mannered and polite, and except a slight sign of condescension, I should say pleasant."

"I take it," said the sailor, "he must be an arrant snob."

"Not necessarily, Jack," said Temple. "There is nothing ignoble in a man's desire to live with the best people, if he do nothing mean to reach that goal."

"Whom do you call the best people, Temple?" asked the other.

"By the best people, I mean the first in rank and station. I am not speaking of their moral excellence, but of their social superiority, and of that pre-eminence which comes of an indisputable position, high name, fortune, and the world's regards. These I call the best people to live with."

"And I do not," said Jack, rising, and throwing his napkin on the table, "not at least for men like myself. I want to associate with my equals. I want to mix with men who cannot overbear me by any accident of their wealth or title."

"Jack should never have gone into the navy, that's clear," said Augustus, laughing; "but let us draw round the fire and have a cigar."

"You'll have to pay your visit to the drawing-room, L'Estrange," said Jack, "before we begin to smoke, for the governor hates tobacco, and detects it in an instant."

"I declare," said the parson, as he looked at his splashed cords and dirty boots, "I have no courage to present myself in such a trim as this."

"Report yourself and come back at once," cried Jack.

"I'd say, don't go in at all," said Temple.

"That's what I should do, certainly," said Augustus. "Sit down here. What are you drinking? This is Pomare, and better than claret of a cold evening."

And the curate yielded to the soft persuasion, and seated around the fire, the young men talked horses, dogs, and field-sports, till the butler came to say that tea was served in the drawing-room, when, rising, they declared themselves too tired to stay up longer, and wishing each other good-night they sauntered up to their rooms to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE CROQUÊT LAWN.

THE day after a hard run, like the day after a battle, is often spent in endeavours to repair the disasters of the struggle. So was it here. The young men passed the morning in the stables, or going back and forward with bandages and liniments. There was a tendon to be cared for, a sore back to be attended to. Benbo, too, wouldn't feed; the groom said he had got a surfeit; which malady, in stable parlance, applies to excess of work, as well as excess of diet.

Augustus Bramleigh was, as becomes an eldest son, grandly imperious and dictatorial, and looked at his poor discomfited beast, as he stood with hanging head and heaving flanks, as though to say it was a disgraceful thing for an animal that had the honour to carry him to look so craven and disheartened.

Temple, with the instincts of his craft and calling, cared little for the past, and took but small interest in the horse that was not likely to be soon of use to him; while Jack, with all a sailor's energy, worked away manfully, and assisted the grooms in every way he could. It was at the end of a very active morning, that Jack was returning to the house, when he saw L'Estrange's pony-chaise at the door, with black Nora in the shafts, as fresh and hearty to all seeming as though she had not carried her heavy owner through one of the stiffest runs of the season only the day before.

"Is your master here, Bill?" asked Jack of the small urchin, who barely reached the bar of the bit.

"No, sir; it's Miss Julia has druv over. Master's fishing this morning."

Now Julia L'Estrange was a very pretty girl, and with a captivation of manner which to the young sailor was irresistible. She had been brought up in France, and imbibed that peculiar quiet coquetry which, in its quaint demureness, suggests just enough doubt of its sincerity to be provocative. She was dark enough to be a Spaniard from the south of Spain, and her long black eyelashes were darker

even than her eyes. In her walk and her gesture there was that also which reminded one of Spain: the same blended litheness and dignity; and there was a firmness in her tread which took nothing from its elasticity.

When Jack heard that she was in the house, instead of hurrying in to meet her he sat moodily down on the steps of the door and lighted his cigar. "What's the use?" muttered he, and the same depressing sentence recurred to him again and again. They are very dark moments in life in which we have to confess to ourselves that, fight how we may, fate must beat us; that the very utmost we can do is to maintain a fierce struggle with destiny, but that in the end we must succumb. The more frequently poor Jack saw her, the more hopelessly he felt his lot. What was he,—what could he ever be, to aspire to such a girl as Julia? Was not the very presumption a thing to laugh at? He thought of how his elder brother would entertain such a notion; the cold solemnity with which he would ridicule his pretensions; and then Temple would treat him to some profound reflections on the misery of poor marriages; while Marion would chime in with some cutting

reproaches on the selfishness with which, to gratify a caprice—she would call it a caprice—he ignored the just pretensions of his family, and the imperative necessity that pressed them to secure their position in the world by great alliances. This was Marion's code: it took three generations to make a family; the first must be wealthy; the second, by the united force of money and ability, secure a certain station of power and social influence; the third must fortify these by marriages—marriages of distinction; after which mere time would do the rest.

She had hoped much from her father's second marriage, and was grievously disappointed on finding how her stepmother's family affected displeasure at the match as a reason for a coldness towards them; while Lady Augusta herself has openly showed that she had stooped to the union merely to secure herself against the accidents of life, and raise her above the misery of living on a very small income.

Jack was thinking moodily over all these things as he sat there, and with such depression of spirit that he half resolved, instead of staying out his full leave, to return to his ship at Portsmouth, and so forget shore life and all its fascinations. He heard

the sound of a piano, and shortly after the rich delicious tones of Julia's voice. It was that mellow quality of sound musicians call mezzo soprano, whose gift it is to steal softly over the senses and steep them in a sweet rapture of peaceful delight. As the strains floated out, he felt as though the measure of incantation was running over for him, and he arose with a bound and hurried off into the wood. "I'll start to-morrow. I'll not let this folly master me," muttered he. "A fellow who can't stand up against his own fancies is not worth his salt. I'll go on board again and think of my duty," and he tried to assure himself that of all living men a sailor had least excuse for such weaknesses as these.

He had not much sympathy with the family ambitions. He thought that as they had wealth enough to live well and handsomely, a good station in the world, and not any one detracting element from their good-luck, either as regarded character or health, it was downright ingratitude to go in search of disappointments and defeats. It was, to his thinking, like a ship with plenty of sea-room rushing madly on to her ruin amongst the breakers. "I think Nelly is of my own mind," said he, "but who can say how

long she will continue to be so? these stupid notions of being great folk will get hold of her at last. The high-minded Marion and that great genius Temple are certain to prevail in the end, and I shall always be a splendid example to point at and show the melancholy consequences of degenerate tastes and ignoble ambitions."

The sharp trot of a horse on the gravel road beside him startled him in his musings, and the pony-carriage whisked rapidly by; Augustus driving and Julia at his side. She was laughing. Her merry laugh rang out above the brisk jingle of horse and harness, and to the poor sailor it sounded like the knell of all his hopes. "What a confounded fool I was not to remember I had an elder brother," said he, bitterly. That he added something inaudible about the perfidious nature of girls is possibly true, but not being in evidence it is not necessary to record it.

Let us turn from the disconsolate youth to what is certes a prettier picture—the croquêt lawn behind the house, where the two sisters, with the accomplished Temple, were engaged at a game.

"I hope, girls," said he, in one of his very finest

drawls, "the future head of house and hopes is not going to make a precious fool of himself."

"You mean with the curate's sister," said Marion, with a saucy toss of her head. "I scarcely think he could be so absurd."

"I can't see the absurdity," broke in Ellen. "I think a duke might make her a duchess, and no great condescension in the act."

"Quite true, Nelly," said Temple; "that's exactly what a duke might do; but Mr. Bramleigh cannot. When you are at the top of the ladder, there's nothing left for you but to come down again; but the man at the bottom has to try to go up."

"But why must there be a ladder at all, Temple?" asked she eagerly.

"Isn't that speech Nelly all over?" cried Marion haughtily.

"I hope it is," said Ellen, "if it serves to convey what I faithfully believe,—that we are great fools in not enjoying a very pleasant lot in life instead of addressing ourselves to ambitions far and away beyond us."

"And which be they?" asked Temple, crossing

his arms over his mallet, and standing like a soldier on guard.

"To be high and titled, or if not titled, to be accepted amongst that class, and treated as their equals in rank and condition."

"And why not, Nelly? What is this wonderful ten thousand that we all worship? Whence is it recruited, and how? These double wallflowers are not of Nature's making; they all come of culture, of fine mould, careful watering, and good gardening. They were single-petalled once on a time, like ourselves. Mind, it is no radical says this, girls—'moi qui vous parle' am no revolutionist, no leveller! I like these grand conditions, because they give existence its best stimulus, its noblest aspirations. The higher one goes in life—as on a mountain—the more pure the air and the wider the view."

"And do you mean to tell me that Augustus would consult his happiness better in marrying some fine lady, like our grand stepmamma for instance, than a charming girl like Julia?" said Ellen.

"If Augustus' notions of happiness were to be measured by mine, I should say yes, unquestionably yes. Love is a very fleeting sentiment. The cost

of the article, too, suggests most uncomfortable reflections. All the more as the memory comes when the acquisition itself is beginning to lose value. My former chief at Munich—the cleverest man of the world I ever met—used to say, as an investment, a pretty wife was a mistake. 'If,' said he, 'you laid out your money on a picture, your venture might turn out a bargain; if you bought a colt, your two-year-old might win a Derby; but your beauty of to-day will be barely good-looking in five years, and will be a positive fright in fifteen.'"

"Your accomplished friend was an odious beast!" said Nelly. "What was his name, Temple?"

"Lord Culduff, one of the first diplomatists in Europe."

"Culduff? How strange! Papa's agent, Mr. Harding, mentioned the name at breakfast. He said there was a nobleman come over from Germany to see his estates in the north of Down, where they had some hopes of having discovered coal."

"Is it possible Lord Culduff could be in our neighbourhood? The governor must ask him here at once," said Temple, with an animation of manner most unusual with him. "There must be no time

lost about this. Finish your game without me, girls, for this matter is imminent;" and so saying, he resigned his mallet and hastened away to the house.

"I never saw Temple so eager about anything before," said Nelly. "It's quite charming to see how the mere mention of a grand name can call forth all his energy."

"Temple knows the world very well; and he knows how the whole game of life is conducted by a very few players, and that every one who desires to push his way must secure the intimacy, if he can, or at least the acquaintance, of these." And Marion delivered this speech with a most oracular and pretentious tone.

"Yes," said Nelly, with a droll sparkle in her eye; "he declared that profound statement last evening in the very same words. Who shall say it is not an immense advantage to have a brother so full of sage maxims, while his sisters are seen to catch up his words of wisdom, and actually believe them to be their own?"

"Temple may not be a Talleyrand; but he is certainly as brilliant as the charming Curate," said Marion, tartly.

"Oh, poor George!" cried Nelly; and her cheek flushed while she tried to seem indifferent. "Nobody ever called him a genius. When one says he is very good-looking and very good-humoured, tout est dit!"

"He is very much out of place as a parson."

"Granted. I suspect he thinks so himself."

"Men usually feel that they cannot take orders without some stronger impulse than a mere desire to gain a livelihood."

"I have never talked to him on the matter; but perhaps he had no great choice of a career."

"He might have gone into the army, I suppose? He'd have found scores of creatures there with about his own measure of intelligence."

"I fancied you liked George, Marion," said the other. And there was something half tender, half reproachful, in her tone.

"I liked him so far, that it was a boon to find anything so like a gentleman in this wild savagery; but if you mean that I would have endured him in town, or would have noticed him in society, you are strangely mistaken."

"Poor George!" and there was something comic in her glance as she sighed these words out.

"There; you have won," said Marion, throwing down her mallet. "I must go and hear what Temple is going to do. It would be a great blessing to see a man of the world and a man of mark in this dreary spot, and I hope papa will not lose the present opportunity to secure him."

"Are you alone, Nelly?" said her eldest brother, some time after, as he came up, and found her sitting, lost in thought, under a tree.

"Yes. Marion got tired and went in, and Temple went to ask papa about inviting some high and mighty personage who chances to be in our neighbourhood."

"Who is he?"

"Lord Culduff, he called him."

"Oh! a tremendous swell; an ambassador somewhere. What brings him down here?"

"I forget. Yes! it was something about a mine; he has found tin, or copper, or coal, I don't remember which, on some property of his here. By the way, Augustus, do you really think George L'Estrange a fool?"

"Think him a fool?"

"I mean," said she, blushing deeply, "Marion

holds his intelligence so cheaply that she is quite shocked at his presuming to be in orders."

"Well, I don't think him exactly what Temple calls an 'esprit fort,' but he is a very nice fellow, very companionable, and a thorough gentleman in all respects."

"How well you have said it, dear Augustus," said she, with a face beaming with delight. "Where are you off to? Where are you going?"

"I am going to see the yearlings, in the paddock below the river."

"May I go with you, Gussy?" said she, drawing her arm within his. "I do like a brisk walk with you; and you always go like one with a purpose."

CHAPTER V.

CONFIDENTIAL TALK.

TEMPLE found his father in his study, deeply engaged with a mass of papers and letters, and by the worn and fatigued expression of his face showing that he had passed a day of hard work.

"I hope I do not disturb you," said Temple, as he leaned on the table at which the other was seated.

"Throw that cigar away, and I'll tell you," said the old man, with a faint smile. "I never can conquer my aversion to tobacco. What do you want to say? Is it anything we cannot talk over at dinner, or after dinner?—for this post leaves at such an inconvenient hour, it gives me scant time to write."

"I beg a thousand pardons, sir; but I have just heard that a very distinguished member of our corps —I mean the diplomatic corps—is down in this

neighbourhood, and I want your permission to ask him over here."

"Who is he?"

"Lord Culduff."

"What! that old scamp who ran away with Lady Clifford? I thought he couldn't come to England?"

"Why, sir, he is one of the first men we have. It was he that negotiated the Erzeroum treaty, and I heard Sir Stamford Bolter say he was the only man in England who understood the Sound dues."

"He ran off with another man's wife, and I don't like that."

"Well, sir, as he didn't marry her afterwards, it was clear it was only a passing indiscretion."

"Oh, indeed! that view of it never occurred to me. I suppose, then, it is in this light the corps regards it?"

"I trust so, sir. Where there is no complication there is no loss of character; and as Lord Culduff is received everywhere, and courted in the very best circles, I think it would be somewhat strange if we were to set up to teach the world how it ought to treat him."

"I have no such pretension. I simply claim the right to choose the people I invite to my house."

"He may be my chief to-morrow or next day," said Temple.

"So much the worse for you."

"Certainly not, sir, if we seize the opportunity to show him some attentions. He is a most high-bred gentleman, and from his abilities, his rank, and his connections, sure to be at the head of the line; and I confess I'd be very much ashamed if he were to hear, as he is sure to hear, that I was in his vicinity without my ever having gone to wait on him."

"Go by all means, then. Wait upon him at once, Temple; but I tell you frankly, I don't fancy presenting such a man to your sisters."

"Why, sir, there is not a more unobjectionable man in all England; his manners are the very type of respectful deference towards ladies. He belongs to that old school which professes to be shocked with modern levity, while his whole conversation is a sort of quiet homage."

"Well, well; how long would he stay—a week?"

"A couple of days, perhaps, if he came at all.

Indeed, I greatly doubt that he would come. They say he is here about some coal-mine they have discovered on his property."

"What! has he found coal?" cried the old man, eagerly.

"So it is said, sir; or, at least, he hopes so."

"It's only lignite. I'm certain it's only lignite. I have been deceived myself twice or thrice, and I don't believe coal—real coal—exists in this part of Ireland."

"Of that, I can tell you nothing; he, however, will only be too glad to talk the matter over with you."

"Yes; it is an interesting topic,—very interesting. Snell says that the great carboniferous strata are all in Ireland, but that they lie deep and demand vast capital to work them. He predicts a great manufacturing prosperity to the country when Manchester and Birmingham will have sunk into ruins. He opines that this lignite is a mere indication of the immense vein of true carbon beneath. But what should this old debauchee know of a great industrial theme! His whole anxiety will be to turn it to some immediate profit. He'll be looking for a loan, you'll

see. Mark my words, Temple, he'll want an advance on his colliery." And he gave one of those rich chuckling laughs which are as peculiar to the moneyed classes as ever a simpering smile was to enamelled beauty.

" I don't say," added he, after a moment, " that the scheme may not be a good one—an excellent one. Sampson says that all manufactures will be transferred to Ireland yet,—that this will be in some future time the great seat of national industry and national wealth. Let your grand friend come then by all means; there is at least one topic we can talk over together."

Too happy to risk the success he had obtained by any further discussion, Temple hurried away to give orders for the great man's reception. There was a small suite of rooms, which had been furnished with unusual care and elegance when it was believed that Lady Augusta would have honoured Castello with her presence. Indeed, she had so far favoured the belief as to design some of the decorations herself, and had photographs taken of the rooms and the furniture, as well as of the views which presented themselves from the windows.

Though these rooms were on the second floor, they were accessible from without by a carriage-drive, which wound gradually up among the terraced gardens to a sort of plateau, where a marble fountain stood, with a group of Naiads in the midst, over whom a perpetual spray fell like a veil; the whole surrounded with flowery shrubs and rare plants, sheltered from east and north by a strong belt of trees, and actually imparting to the favoured spot the character of a southern climate and country.

As the gardener was careful to replace the exhausted or faded flowers by others in full bloom, and as on every available day he displayed here the richest treasures of his conservatory, there was something singularly beautiful in the contrast of this foreground, glowing in tropical luxuriance, with the massive forest-trees down below, and farther in the distance the stern and rugged lines of the Mourne Mountains, as they frowned on the sea.

Within doors, everything that wealth could contribute to comfort was present, and though there was magnificence in the costly silk of the hangings and the velvety richness of the carpets, the prevailing impression was that it was enjoyment, not splendour,

was sought for. There were few pictures—a Rysdael over the fireplace in the drawing-room, and two or three Cuyps—placid scenes of low-lying landscapes, bathed in soft sunsets. The doors were all hidden by heavy curtains, and a sense of voluptuous snugness seemed the spirit of the place.

The keys of this precious suite were in Marion's keeping, and as she walked through the rooms with Temple, and expatiated on the reckless expenditure bestowed upon them, she owned that for any less distinguished guest than the great diplomatist she would never have consented to their being opened. Temple, however, was loud in his praises, went over his high connections and titled relatives, his great services, and the immense reputation they had given him, and, last of all, he spoke of his personal qualities, the charm of his manner, and the captivation of his address, so that finally she became as eager as himself to see this great and gifted man beneath their roof.

During the evening they talked much together of what they should do to entertain their illustrious guest. There was, so to say, no neighbourhood, nor any possibility of having people to meet him, and

they must, consequently, look to their home resources to amuse him.

"I hope Augustus will be properly attentive," said Temple.

"I'm certain he will. I'm more afraid of Nelly, if there be anything strange or peculiar in Lord Culduff's manner. She never puts any curb on her enjoyment of an oddity, and you'll certainly have to caution her that her humouristic talents must be kept in abeyance just now."

"I can trust Lord Culduff's manner to repress any tendency of this kind. Rely upon it, his courtly urbanity and high tone will protect him from all indiscretions; and Nelly—I'm sorry to say it, Marion—but Nelly is vulgar."

"She is certainly too familiar on fresh acquaintance. I have told her more than once that you do not always please people by showing you are on good terms with yourself. It is a great misfortune to her that she never was "out" before she came here. One season in town would have done more for her than all our precepts."

"Particularly as she heeds them so little," said Temple, snappishly.

"Cannot we manage to have some people to meet Lord Culduff at dinner? Who are the Gages who left their cards?"

"They sent them — not left them. Montifort Gage is the master of the hounds, and, I believe, a person of some consideration here. He does not, however, appear to invite much intimacy. His note acknowledging our subscription—it was a hundred pounds too—was of the coldest, and we exchanged a very few formal words at the meet yesterday."

"Are we going to repeat the Herefordshire experiment here, then?" And she asked the question with a sparkling eye and a flushed cheek, as though the feeling it excited was not easily to be repressed.

"There's a Sir Roger Kennedy, too, has called."

"Yes, and Harding says he is married; but his wife's name is not on the card."

"I take it they know very little of the habits of the world. Let us remember, Marion, where we are. Iceland is next door but one. I thought Harding would have looked to all this; he ought to have taken care that the county was properly attentive. An agent never wishes to see his chief reside

on the property. It is like in my own career,—one is only chargé-d'affaires when the head of the legation is on leave."

"And this was the county, we were told, was ready to receive us with a sort of frantic enthusiasm. I wonder, Temple, do people ever tell the truth!"

"Yes, when they want you not to believe them. You see, Marion, we blundered here pretty much as we blundered in England. You'll not get the governor to believe it, nor perhaps even Augustus, but there is a diplomacy of every-day life, and people who fancy they can dispense with it invariably come to grief. Now I always told them—indeed I grew tired telling them—every mile that separates you from a Capital diminishes the power of your money. In the city you reign supreme, but to be a county magnate you need scores of things beside a long credit at your banker's."

A very impatient toss of the head showed that Marion herself was not fully a convert to these sage opinions, and it was with a half-rude abruptness that she broke in by asking how he intended to convey his invitation to Lord Culduff.

"There's the difficulty," said he, gravely. "He is going about from one place to another. Harding says he was at Rathbeggan on Sunday last, and was going on to Dinasker next day. I have been looking over the map, but I see no roads to these places. I think our best plan is to despatch Lacy with a letter. Lacy is the smartest fellow we have, and I think will be sure to find him. But the letter, too, is a puzzle."

"Why should it be? It will be, I suppose, a mere formal invitation?"

"No, no. It would never do to say, Colonel Bramleigh presents his compliments, and requests —and so on. The thing must have another tone. It ought to have a certain turn of expression."

"I am not aware of what amount of acquaintanceship exists between you and Lord Culduff," said she stiffly.

"The very least in life. I suspect if we met in a club, we should pass without speaking. I arrived at his Legation on the morning he was starting on leave. I remember he asked me to breakfast, but I declined, as I had been three days and nights on the road, and wanted to get to bed. I never met

him since. What makes you look so serious, Marion?"

"I'm thinking what we shall do with him if he comes. Does he shoot, or hunt, or fish?—can you give him any out-o'-door occupation?"

"I'm quite abroad as to all his tastes and habits. I only know so much of him as pertains to his character in the 'line;' but I'll go and write my note. I'll come back and show you what I have said," added he, as he gained the door.

When Marion was left alone to reflect over her brother's words, she was not altogether pleased. She was no convert to his opinions as to the necessity of any peculiar stratagem in the campaign of life. She had seen the house in town crowded with very great and distinguished company; she had observed how wealth asserted itself in society, and she could not perceive that in their acceptance by the world, there was any the slightest deficiency of deference and respect. If they had failed in their county experiment in England, it was, she thought, because her father rashly took up an extreme position in politics, a mistake which Augustus indeed saw and protested against, but which some rash

advisers were able to over-persuade the Colonel into adopting.

Lady Augusta, too, was an evidence that the better classes did not decline this alliance, and on the whole she felt that Temple's reasonings were the offshoots of his peculiar set; that small priesthood of society who hold themselves so essentially above the great body of mankind.

"Not that we must make any more mistakes, however," thought she. "Not that we can afford another defeat;" and as she arrived at this sage judgment, Temple entered, with some sheets of note-paper in his end.

"I'm not quite satisfied with any of these, Marion; I suspect I must just content myself with a mere formal 'requests the company.'"

"Let me hear what you have said."

"Here's the first," said he, reading. "'My dear Lord,—The lucky accident of your lordship's presence in this neighbourhood:—which I have only accidentally learned.'"

"O dear, no! that's a chapter of 'accidents.'"

"Well; listen to this one: 'If I can trust to a rumour that has just reached us here, but which, it

him since. What makes you look so serious, Marion?"

"I'm thinking what we shall do with him if he comes. Does he shoot, or hunt, or fish?—can you give him any out-o'-door occupation?"

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"Well; listen to this one: 'If I can trust to a rumour that has just reached us here, but which, it

is possible our hopes may have given a credence to, that stern fact will subsequently deny, or reject, or contradict.' I'm not fully sure which verb to take."

"Much worse than the other," said Marion.

"It's all the confounded language; I could turn it in French to perfection."

"But I fancied your whole life was passed in this sort of phrase-fashioning, Temple?" said she, half smiling.

"Nothing of the kind. We keep the vernacular only for post-paper, and it always begins: 'My Lord,—Since by my despatch, No. 7,028, in which I reported to your lordship the details of an interview accorded me by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of this Government;' and so on. Now all this, to the polite intercourse of society, is pretty much what singlestick is to the rapier. I wish you'd do this for me, Marion. After so many baulks, one always ends by a tumble."

"I declare I see no occasion for smartness or epigram. I'd simply say, 'I have only just heard that you are in our neighbourhood, and I beg to convey my father's hope and request that you will not leave it without giving us the honour of your

company here.' You can throw in as many of your personal sentiments as may serve, like wool in a packing-case, to keep the whole tight and compact; but I think something like that would suffice."

"Perhaps so," said he, musingly, as he once more returned to his room. When he reappeared, after some minutes, it was with the air and look of a man who had just thrown off some weighty burden. "Thank heaven, it's done and despatched," said he. "I have been looking over the F. O. Guide, to see whether I addressed him aright. I fancied he was a Privy Councillor, and I find he is not; he is a K.C.B., however, and a Guelph, with leave to wear the star."

"Very gratifying to us—I mean if he should come here," said she, with a mocking smile.

"Don't pretend you do not value all these things fully as much as myself, Marion. You know well what the world thinks of them. These distinctions were no more made by us than the money of the realm; but we use one of them like the other, well aware that it represents a certain value, and is never disputed."

"How old is your friend?"

"Well, he is certainly not young. Here's what F. O. contributes to his biography. 'Entered the army as cornet in the 2nd Life Guards, 1816.' A precious long time ago that. 'First groom of the bedchamber—promoted—placed on half-pay—entered diplomatic service—in—19; special mission to Hanover—made K.C.B.—contested Essex, and returned on a petition—went back to diplomacy, and named special envoy to Tehran.' Ah! now we are coming to his real career."

"Oh, dear. I'd rather hear about him somewhat earlier," said she, taking the book out of his hand, and throwing it on the table. "It is a great penalty to pay for greatness to be gibbeted in this fashion. Don't you think so, Temple?"

"I wish I could see myself gibbeted, as you call it."

"If the will makes the way, we ought to be very great people," said she, with a smile, half derisive, half real. "Jack, perhaps not; nor Ellen. They have booked themselves in second-class carriages."

"I'll go and look up Harding; he is a secret sort of a fellow. I believe all agents assume that manner to every one but the head of the house and the heir.

But perhaps I could manage to find out why these people have not called upon us; there must be something in it."

"I protest I think we ought to feel grateful to them; an exchange of hospitalities with them would be awful."

"Very likely; but I think we ought to have had the choice, and this they have not given us."

"And even for that I am grateful," said she, as with a haughty look she rose and left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

UP IN THE MOUNTAINS.

About eighteen miles from Bishop's Folly, and in the very midst of the Mourne Mountains, a low spur of land projects into the sea by a thin narrow promontory, so narrow, indeed, that in days of heavy sea and strong wind, the waves have been seen to meet across it. Some benevolent individual had once conceived the idea of planting a small lighthouse here, as a boon to the fishermen who frequent the coast. The lighthouse was built, but never occupied, and after standing some years in a state of half ruin, was turned into a sort of humble inn or shebeen, most probably a mere pretext to cover its real employment as a depôt for smuggled goods; for in the days of high duties French silks and brandies found many channels into Ireland beside the road that lay through her Majesty's customs. Mr., or,

as he was more generally called, Tim Mackessy, the proprietor, was a well-known man in those parts. He followed what in Ireland for some years back has been as much a profession as law or physic, and occasionally a more lucrative line than either—Patriotism. He was one of those ready, voluble, self-asserting fellows, who abound in Ireland, but whose favour is not the less with their countrymen from the fact of their frequency. He had, he said, a father, who suffered for his country in ninety-eight; and he had himself maintained the family traditions by being twice imprisoned in Carrickfergus Gaol, and narrowly escaping transportation for life. On the credit of this martyrdom, and the fact that Mr. O'Connell once called him "honest Tim Mackessy," he had lived in honour and repute amongst such of his countrymen as "feel the yoke and abhor the rule of the Saxon."

For the present, we are, however, less occupied by Tim and his political opinions than by two guests, who had arrived a couple of days before, and were now seated at breakfast in that modest apartment called the best parlour. Two men less like in appearance might not readily be found. One, thin, fresh-looking,

with handsome but haughty features, slightly stooped, but to all seeming as much from habit as from any debility, was Lord Culduff; his age might be computed by some reference to the list of his services, but would have been a puzzling calculation from a mere inspection of himself. In figure and build, he might be anything from five-and-thirty to two or three and forty; in face, at a close inspection, he might have been high up in the sixties.

His companion was a middle-sized, middle-aged man, with a mass of bushy curly black hair, a round bullet head, wide-set eyes, and a short nose, of the leonine pattern; his mouth, large and thick-lipped, had all that mobility that denotes talker and eater: for Mr. Cutbill, civil engineer and architect, was both garrulous and gourmand, and lived in the happy enjoyment of being thought excellent company, and a first-rate judge of a dinner. He was musical too; he played the violoncello with some skill, and was an associate of various philharmonics, who performed fantasias and fugues to dreary old ladies and snuffy old bachelors, who found the amusement an economy that exacted nothing more costly than a little patience. Amongst these Tom Cutbill was

a man of wit and man of the world. His career brought him from time to time into contact with persons of high station and rank, and these he ventilated amongst his set in the most easy manner, familiarly talking of Beaufort, and Argyle, and Cleveland, as though they were household words.

It was reported that he had some cleverness as an actor; and he might have had, for the man treated life as a drama, and was eternally representing something,—some imaginary character,—till any little fragment of reality in him had been entirely rubbed out by the process, and he remained the mere personation of whatever the society he chanced to be in wanted or demanded of him.

He had been recommended to Lord Culduff's notice by his lordship's London agent, who had said,—"He knows the scientific part of his business as well as the great swells of his profession, and he knows the world a precious sight better than they do. *They* could tell you if you have coal, but he will do that and more; *he* will tell you what to do with it." It was on the advice thus given Lord Culduff had secured his services, and taken him over to Ireland. It was a bitter pill to swallow, for this

old broken-down man of fashion, self-indulgent, fastidious, and refined, to travel in such company; but his affairs were in a sad state, from years of extravagance and high living, and it was only by the supposed discovery of these mines on this unprofitable part of his estate that his creditors consented to defer that settlement which might sweep away almost all that remained to him. Cutbill was told, too,—"His lordship is rather hard-up just now, and cannot be liberal as he could wish; but he is a charming person to know, and will treat you like a brother." The one chink in this shrewd fellow's armour was his snobbery. It was told of him once, in a very dangerous illness, when all means of inducing perspiration had failed, that some one said,—"Try him with a Lord, it never failed with Tom yet." If an untitled squire had proposed to take Mr. Cutbill over special to Ireland for a hundred-pound note and his expenses, he would have indignantly refused the offer, and assisted the proposer besides to some unpalatable reflections on his knowledge of life; the thought, however, of journeying as Lord Culduff's intimate friend, being treated as his brother, thrown, from the very nature of the

country they travelled in, into close relations, and left free to improve the acquaintance by all those social wiles and accomplishments on which he felt he could pride himself, was a bribe not to be resisted. And thus was it that these two men, so unlike in every respect, found themselves fellow-travellers and companions.

A number of papers, plans, and drawings littered the breakfast-table at which they were seated, and one of these, representing the little promontory of arid rock, tastefully coloured and converted into a handsome pier, with flights of steps descending to the water, and massive cranes swinging bulky masses of merchandise into tall-masted ships, was just then beneath his lordship's double eyeglass.

"Where may all this be, Cutbill? is it Irish?" asked he.

"It is to be out yonder, my lord," said he, pointing through the little window to the rugged line of rocks, over which the sea was breaking in measured rhythm.

"You don't mean there?" said Lord Culduff, half horrified.

"Yes, my lord, there! Your lordship is doubtless not aware that of all her Majesty's faithful lieges the

speculative are the least gifted with the imaginative faculty, and to supply this unhappy want in their natures, we, whose function it is to suggest great industrial schemes or large undertakings,—we 'Promoters,' as we are called, are obliged to supply, not merely by description, but actually pictorially, the results which success will in due time arrive at. We have, as the poet says, to annihilate 'both time and space,' and arrive at a goal which no effort of these worthy people's minds could possibly attain to. What your lordship is now looking at is a case in point, and however little promising the present aspect of that coast-line may seem, time and money,—yes, my lord, time and money—the two springs of all success—will make even greater change than you see depicted here." Mr. Cutbill delivered these words with a somewhat pompous tone, and in a voice such as he might have used in addressing an acting committee or a special board of works; for one of his fancies was, to believe himself an orator of no mean power.

"I trust, I fervently trust, Mr. Cutbill," said his lordship nervously, "that the coal-fields are somewhat nigher the stage of being remunerative than that

broken line of rock is to this fanciful picture before me."

"Wealth, my lord, like heat, has its latent conditions."

"Condescend to a more commonplace tone, sir, in consideration of my ignorance, and tell me frankly, is the mine as far from reality, as that reef there?"

Fortunately for Mr Cutbill perhaps, the door was opened at this critical juncture, and the landlord presented himself with a note, stating that the groom who brought it would wait for the answer.

Somewhat agitated by the turn of his conversation with the engineer, Lord Culduff tore open the letter, and ran his eyes towards the end to see the signature. "Who is Bramleigh—Temple Bramleigh? Oh, I remember, an attaché. What's all this about Castello? Where's Castello?"

"That's the name they give the Bishop's Folly, my lord," said the landlord, with a half grin.

"What business have these people to know I am here at all? Why must they persecute me? You told me, Cutbill, that I was not to be discovered."

"So I did, my lord, and I made the *Down Express* call you Mr. Morris, of Charing Cross."

His lordship winced a little at the thought of such a liberty, even for a disguise, but he was now engaged with the note, and read on without speaking. "Nothing could be more courteous, certainly," said he, folding it up, and laying it beside him on the table.

"They invite me over to—what's the name?—Castello, and promise me perfect liberty as regards my time. 'To make the place my head-quarters,' as he says. Who are these Bramleighs? You know every one, Cutbill; who are they?"

"Bramleigh and Underwood are bankers, very old-established firm. Old Bramleigh was a brewer, at Slough; George the Third never would drink any other stout than Bramleigh's. There was a large silver flagon, called the 'King's Quaigh,' always brought out when his Majesty rode by, and very vain old Bramleigh used to be of it, though I don't think it figures now on the son's sideboard—they have leased the brewery."

"Oh, they have leased the brewery, have they?"

"That they have; the present man got himself made Colonel of militia, and meant to be a county member, and he might too, if he hadn't been in too great a hurry about it; but county people won't stand

being carried by assault. Then they made other mistakes; tried it on with the Liberals, in a shire where everything that called itself gentleman was Tory; in fact, they plunged from one hole into another, till they regularly swamped themselves; and as their house held a large mortgage on these estates in Ireland, they paid off the other encumbrances and have come to live here. I know the whole story, for it was an old friend of mine who made the plans for restoring the mansion."

"I suspect that the men in your profession, Cutbill, know as much of the private history of English families as any in the land?"

"More, my lord; far more even than the solicitors, for people suspect the solicitors, and they never suspect us. We are detectives in plain clothes." The pleasant chuckle with which Mr. Cutbill finished his speech was not responded to by his lordship, who felt that the other should have accepted his compliment, without any attempt on his own part to "cap" it.

"How long do you imagine I may be detained here, Cutbill?" asked he, after a pause.

"Let us say a week, my lord, or ten days at

furthest. We ought certainly to see that new pit opened, before you leave."

"In that case I may as well accept this invitation. I can bear a little boredom if they have only a good cook. Do you suppose they have a good cook?"

"The agent, Jos Harding, told me they had a Frenchman, and that the house is splendidly got up."

"What's to be done with *you*, Cutbill, eh?"

"I am at your lordship's orders," said he, with a very quiet composure.

"You have nothing to do over at that place just now?—I mean at the mine."

"No, my lord. Till Pollard makes his report, I have nothing to call me over there."

"And here, I take it, we have seen everything," and he gave a very hopeless look through the little window as he spoke.

"There it is, my lord," said Cutbill, taking up the coloured picture of the pier, with its busy crowds, and its bustling porters. "There it is!"

"I should say, Cutbill, there it is not!" observed the other bitterly. "Anything more unlike the reality is hard to conceive."

"Few things are as like a cornet in the Life Guards, as a child in a perambulator——"

"Very well, all that," interrupted Lord Culduff impatiently. "I know that sort of argument perfectly. I have been pestered with the acorn, or rather, with the unborn forests in the heart of the acorn, for many a day. Let us get a stride in advance of these platitudes. Is the whole thing like this?" and he threw the drawing across the table contemptuously as he spoke. "Is it all of this pattern, eh?"

"In one sense it is very like," said the other, with a greater amount of decision in his tone than usual.

"In which case, then, the sooner we abandon it the better," said Lord Culduff, rising, and standing with his back to the fire, his head high, and his look intensely haughty.

"It is not for me to dictate to your lordship—I could never presume to do so—but certainly it is not every one in Great Britain who could reconcile himself to relinquish one of the largest sources of wealth in the kingdom. Taking the lowest estimate of Carrick Nuish mine alone,—and when I say the

lowest, I mean throwing the whole thing into a company of shareholders and neither working nor risking a shilling yourself,—you may put from twenty to five-and-twenty thousand pounds into your pocket within a twelvemonth."

"Who will guarantee that, Cutbill?" said Lord Culduff, with a faint smile.

"I am ready myself to do so, provided my counsels be strictly followed. I will do so, with my whole professional reputation."

"I am charmed to hear you say so. It is a very gratifying piece of news for me. You feel, therefore, certain that we have struck coal?"

"My lord, when a young man enters life from one of the universities, with a high reputation for ability, he can go a long way—if he only be prudent—living on his capital. It is the same thing in a great industrial enterprise; you must start at speed, and with a high pressure—get way on you, as the sailors say—and you will skim along for half a mile after the steam is off."

"I come back to my former question. Have we found coal?"

"I hope so. I trust we have. Indeed there is

every reason to say we have found coal. What we need most at this moment is a man like that gentleman whose note is on the table—a large capitalist, a great City name. Let him associate himself in the project, and success is as certain as that we stand here."

"But you have just told me he has given up his business life—retired from affairs altogether."

"My lord, these men never give up. They buy estates, they go live at Rome or Paris, and take a château at Cannes, and try to forget Mincing Lane and the rest of it; but if you watch them, you'll see it's the money article in *The Times* they read before the leader. They have but one barometer for everything that happens in Europe—how are the exchanges? and they are just as greedy of a good thing as on any morning they hurried down to the City in a hansom to buy in or sell out. See if I'm not right. Just throw out a hint, no more, that you'd like a word of advice from Colonel Bramleigh about your project; say it's a large thing—too large for an individual to cope with—that you are yourself the least possible of a business man, being always engaged in very different occupations,—and ask what course he would counsel you to take."

"I might show him these drawings—these coloured plans."

"Well, indeed, my lord," said Cutbill, brushing his mouth with his hand, to hide a smile of malicious drollery, "I'd say I'd not show him the plans. The pictorial rarely appeals to men of his stamp. It's the multiplication-table they like, and if all the world were like them one would never throw poetry into a project."

"You'll have to come with me, Cutbill; I see that," said his lordship, reflectingly.

"My lord, I am completely at your orders."

"Yes; this is a sort of negotiation you will conduct better than myself. I am not conversant with this kind of thing, nor the men who deal in them. A great treaty, a question of boundary, a royal marriage,—any of these would find me ready and prepared, but with the diplomacy of dividends, I own myself little acquainted. You must come with me."

Cutbill bowed in acquiescence, and was silent.

CHAPTER VII.

AT LUNCHEON.

As the family at the Great House were gathered together at luncheon on the day after the events we have just recorded, Lord Culduff's answer to Temple Bramleigh's note was fully and freely discussed.

"Of course," said Jack, "I speak under correction; but how comes it that your high and mighty friend brings another man with him? Is Cutbill an attaché? Is he one of what you call 'the line?'"

"I am happy to contribute the correction you ask for," said Temple, haughtily. "Mr. Cutbill is not a member of the diplomatic body, and though such a name might not impossibly be found in the Navy list, you'll scarcely chance upon it at F. O."

"My chief question is, however, still to be answered. On what pretext does he bring him here?" said Jack, with unbroken good-humour.

"As to that," broke in Augustus, "Lord Culduff's note is perfectly explanatory; he says his friend is travelling with him; they came here on a matter of business, and, in fact, there would be an awkwardness on his part in separating from him, and on ours, if we did not prevent such a contingency."

"Quite so," chimed in Temple. "Nothing could be more guarded or courteous than Lord Culduff's reply. It wasn't in the least like an Admiralty minute, Jack, or an order to Commander Spiggins, of the *Snarler*, to take in five hundred firkins of pork."

"I might say, now, that you'll not find that name in the Navy list, Temple," said the sailor, laughing.

"Do they arrive to-day?" asked Marion, not a little uncomfortable at this exchange of tart things.

"To dinner," said Temple.

"I suppose we have seen the last leg of mutton we are to meet with till he goes," cried Jack; "that precious French fellow will now give his genius full play, and we'll have to dine off 'salmis' and 'suprêmes,' or make our dinner off bread-and-cheese."

"Perhaps you would initiate Bertond into the mystery of a sea-pie, Jack," said Temple, with a smile.

"And a precious mess the fellow would make of it! He'd fill it with cocks' combs and mushrooms, and stick two skewers in it with a half-boiled truffle on each—lucky if there wouldn't be a British flag in spun sugar between them; and he'd call the abomination 'pâté à la gun-room,' or some such confounded name."

A low, quiet laugh was now heard from the end of the table, and the company remembered, apparently for the first time, that Mr. Harding, the agent, was there, and very busily engaged with a broiled chicken.

"Ain't I right, Mr. Harding?" cried Jack, as he heard the low chuckle of the small, meek, submissive-looking little man, at the other end of the table.

"Ain't I right?"

"I have met with very good French versions of English cookery abroad, Captain Bramleigh."

"Don't call me 'Captain' or I'll suspect your accuracy about the cookery," interrupted Jack. "I fear I'm about as far off that rank as Bertond is from the sea-pie."

"Do you know Cutbill, Harding?" said Augustus, addressing the agent in the tone of an heir expectant.

"Yes. We were both examined in the same case before a committee of the House, and I made his acquaintance then."

"What sort of person is he?" asked Temple.

"Is he jolly, Mr. Harding?—that's the question," cried Jack. "I suspect we shall be overborne by greatness, and a jolly fellow would be a boon from heaven."

"I believe he is what might be called jolly," said Harding cautiously.

"Jolly sounds like a familiar word for vulgar," said Marion. "I hope Mr Harding does not mean that."

"Mr. Harding means nothing of the kind, I'll be sworn," broke in Jack. "He means an easy-tempered fellow, amusing and amusable. Well, Nelly, if it's not English, I can't help it—it ought to be; but when one wants ammunition, one takes the first heavy thing at hand. Egad! I'd ram down a minister plenipotentiary, rather than fire blank-cartridge."

"Is Lord Culduff also jolly, Mr. Harding?" asked Eleanor, now looking up with a sparkle in her eye.

"I scarcely know,—I have the least possible acquaintance with his lordship; I doubt, indeed, if he will recollect me," said Harding, with diffidence.

"What are we to do with this heavy swell when he comes, is the puzzle to me," said Augustus, gravely. "How is he to be entertained,—how amused? Here's a county with nothing to see—nothing to interest—without a neighbourhood. What *are* we to do with him?"

"The more one is a man of the world, in the best sense of that phrase, the more easily he finds how to shape his life to any and every circumstance," said Temple, with a sententious tone and manner.

"Which means, I suppose, that he'll make the best of a bad case, and bear our tiresomeness with bland urbanity?" said Jack. "Let us only hope, for all our sakes, that his trial may not be a long one."

"Just to think of such a country!" exclaimed Marion; "there is absolutely no one we could have to meet him."

"What's the name of that half-pay captain who called here t'other morning?—the fellow who sat from luncheon till nigh dusk?" asked Jack.

"Captain Craufurd," replied Marion. "I hope nobody thinks of inviting *him;* he is insufferably vulgar, and presuming besides."

"Wasn't that the man, Marion, who told you that as my father and Lady Augusta didn't live together the county gentry couldn't be expected to call on us?" asked Augustus, laughing.

"He did more: he entered into an explanation of the peculiar tenets of the neighbourhood, and told me if we had had the good luck to have settled in the south or west of Ireland, they'd not have minded it, 'but here,' he added, 'we are great sticklers for morality.'"

"And what reply did you make him, Marion?" asked Jack.

"I was so choked with passion that I couldn't speak, or if I did say anything I have forgotten it. At all events he set me off laughing immediately after, as he said,—'As for myself, I don't care a rush. I'm a bachelor, and a bachelor can go anywhere.'"

She gave these words with such a close mimicry of

his voice and manner, that a general burst of laughter followed them.

"There's the very fellow we want," cried Jack. "That's the man to meet our distinguished guest; he'll not let him escape without a wholesome hint or two."

"I'd as soon see a gentleman exposed to the assault of a mastiff as to the insulting coarseness of such a fellow as that," said Temple, passionately.

"The mischief's done already; I heard the governor say, as he took leave,—'Captain Crauford, are you too straitlaced to dine out on a Sunday? if not, will you honour us with your company at eight o'clock?' And though he repeated the words 'eight o'clock' with a groan like a protest, he muttered something about being happy, a phrase that evidently cost him dearly, for he went shuffling down the avenue afterwards with his hat over his eyes, and gesticulating with his hands as if some new immorality had suddenly broke in upon his mind."

"You mean to say that he is coming to dinner here next Sunday?" asked Temple, horrified.

"A little tact and good management are always

sufficient to keep these sort of men down," said Augustus.

"I hope we don't ask a man to dinner with the intention to 'keep him down,'" said Jack, sturdily.

"At all events," cried Temple, "he need not be presented to Lord Culduff."

"I suspect you will see very little of him after dinner," observed Harding, in his meek fashion. "That wonderful '32 port will prove a detainer impossible to get away from."

"I'll keep him company then. I rather like to meet one of these cross-grained dogs occasionally."

"Not impossibly you'll learn something more of that same 'public opinion' of our neighbours regarding us," said Marion, haughtily.

"With all my heart," cried the sailor, gaily; "they'll not ruffle my temper, even if they won't flatter my vanity."

"Have you asked the L'Estranges, Marion?" said Augustus.

"We always ask them after church; they are sure to be disengaged," said she. "I wish, Nelly, that you, who are such a dear friend of Julia's, would try and persuade her to wear something else than that

eternal black silk. She is so intently bent on being an Andalusian. Some one unluckily said she looked so Spanish, that she has got up the dress, and the little fan coquetry, and the rest of it, in the most absurd fashion."

"Her grandmother was a Spaniard," broke in Nelly, warmly.

"So they say," said the other, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"There's a good deal of style about her," said Temple, with the tone of one who was criticizing what he understood. "She sings prettily."

"Prettily?" groaned Jack. "Why where, except amongst professionals, did you ever hear her equal?"

"She sings divinely," said Ellen; "and it is, after all, one of her least attractions."

"No heroics, for heaven's sake; leave that to your brothers, Nelly, who are fully equal to it. I really meant my remark about her gown for good nature."

"She's a nice girl," said Augustus, "though she is certainly a bit of a coquette."

"True; but it's very good coquetry," drawled out Temple. "It's not that jerking, uncertain, unpurpose-like style of affectation your English coquette

displays. It is not the eternal demand for attention or admiration. It is simply a desire to please thrown into a thousand little graceful ways, each too slight, and too faint, to be singled out for notice, but making up a whole of wonderful captivation."

"Well done diplomacy; egad, I didn't know there was that much blood in the Foreign Office," cried Jack, laughing; "and now I'm off to look after my night-lines. I quite forgot all about them till this minute."

"Take me with you, Jack," said Nelly, and hastened after him, hat in hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARRIVAL OF A GREAT MAN.

It was within a quarter of eight o'clock—forty-five minutes after the usual dinner-hour—when Lord Culduff's carriage drove up to the door.

"The roads are atrocious down here," said Temple, apologizing in advance for an offence which his father rarely, if ever forgave. "Don't you think you ought to go out to meet him, sir?" asked he, half timidly.

"It would only create more delay; he'll appear, I take it, when he is dressed," was the curt rejoinder, but it was scarcely uttered when the door was thrown wide open, and Lord Culduff and Mr. Cutbill were announced.

Seen in the subdued light of a drawing-room before dinner, Lord Culduff did not appear more than half his real age, and the jaunty stride and the

bland smile he wore,—as he made his round of acquaintance—might have passed muster for five-and thirty; nor was the round vulgar figure of the engineer, awkward and familiar alternately, a bad foil for the very graceful attractions of his lordship's manner.

"We should have been here two hours ago," said he, "but my friend here insisted on our coming coastwise to see a wonderful bay—a natural harbour one might call it. What's the name, Cutbill?"

"Portness, my lord."

"Ah, to be sure, Portness. On your property, I believe?"

"I am proud to say it is. I have seen nothing finer in the kingdom," said Bramleigh; "and of Ireland were anything but Ireland, that harbour would be crowded with shipping, and this coast one of the most prosperous and busy shores of the island."

"Who knows if we may not live to see it such? Cutbill's projects are very grand, and I declare that though I deemed them Arabian Night stories a few weeks back, I am a convert now. Another advantage we gained," said he, turning to Marion; "we came

up through a new shrubbery, which we were told had been all planned by you."

"My sister designed it," said she, as she smiled and made a gesture towards Ellen.

"May I offer you my most respectful compliments on your success? I am an enthusiast about landscape-gardening, and though our English climate gives us many a sore rebuff in our attempts, the soil and the varied nature of the surface lend themselves happily to the pursuit. I think you were at the Hague with me, Bramleigh?" asked he of Temple.

"Does he know how late it is?" whispered Augustus to his father. "Does he know we are waiting dinner?"

"I'll tell him," and Colonel Bramleigh walked forward from his place before the fire. "I'm afraid, my lord, the cold air of our hills has not given you an appetite?"

"Quite the contrary, I assure you. I am very hungry."

"By Jove, and so are we!" blurted out Jack; "and it's striking eight this instant."

"What is your dinner-hour?"

"It ought to be seven," answered Jack.

"Why, Cutbill, you told me nine."

Cutbill muttered something below his breath, and turned away; and Lord Culduff laughingly said, "I declare I don't perceive the connection. My friend, Colonel Bramleigh, opines that a French cook always means nine-o'clock dinner. I'm horrified at this delay: let us make a hasty toilette, and repair our fault at once."

"Let me show you where you are lodged," said Temple, not sorry to escape from the drawing-room at a moment when his friend's character and claims were likely to be sharply criticized.

"Cutty's a vulgar dog," said Jack, as they left the room. "But I'll be shot if he's not the best of the two."

A haughty toss of Marion's head showed that she was no concurring party to the sentiment.

"I'm amazed to see so young a man," said Colonel Bramleigh. "In look at least, he isn't forty."

"It's all make-up," cried Jack.

"He can't be a great deal under seventy, taking the list of his services. He was at Vienna as private secretary to Lord Borchester——" As Augustus

pronounced the words Lord Culduff entered the room in a fragrance of perfume and a brilliancy of colour that was quite effective; for he wore his red ribbon, and his blue coat was lined with white silk, and his cheeks glowed with a bloom that youth itself could not rival.

"Who talks of old Borchester?" said he gaily. "My father used to tell me such stories of him. They sent him over to Hanover once, to report on the available princesses to marry the Prince: and egad! he played his part so well that one of them—Princess Helena I think it was—fell in love with him; and if it wasn't that he had been married already,—May I offer my arm?" And the rest of the story was probably told as he led Miss Bramleigh in to dinner.

Mr. Cutbill only arrived as they took their places, and slunk into a seat beside Jack, whom, of all the company, he judged would be the person he could feel most at ease with.

"What a fop!" whispered Jack, with a glance at the peer.

"Isn't he an old humbug?" muttered Cutbill. "Do you know how he managed to appear in so short a time? We stopped two hours at a little inn on

the road while he made his toilette; and the whole get-up—paint and padding and all—was done then. That great fur pelisse in which he made his entrance into the drawing-room removed, he was in full dinner-dress underneath. He 's the best actor living."

"Have you known him long?"

"Oh, yes! I know all of them," said he, with a little gesture of his hand: "that is, they take devilish good care to know *me*."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Jack, in the tone which seemed to ask for some explanation.

"You see, here's how it is," said Cutbill, as he bent over his plate and talked in a tone cautiously subdued: "All those swells—especially that generation yonder—are pretty nigh aground. They have been living for forty or fifty years at something like five times their income; and if it hadn't been for this sudden rush of prosperity in England, caused by railroads, mines, quarries, or the like, these fellows would have been swept clean away. He 's watching me now. I'll go on by-and-by. Have you any good hunting down here, Colonel Bramleigh?" asked he of the host, who sat half hid by a massive centre-piece.

"You'll have to ask my sons what it's like, and I take it they'll give you a mount too."

"With pleasure, Mr. Cutbill," cried Augustus. "If we have no frost, we'll show you some sport on Monday next."

"Delighted,—I like hunting of all things."

"And you, my lord, is it a favourite sport of yours?" asked Temple.

"A long life out of England,—which has unfortunately been my case,—makes a man sadly out of gear in all these things; but I ride, of course," and he said the last words as though he meant to imply "because I do everything."

"I'll send over to L'Estrange," said Augustus; "he's sure to know where the meet is for Monday."

"Who is L'Estrange?" asked his lordship.

"Our curate here," replied Colonel Bramleigh, smiling. "An excellent fellow, and a very agreeable neighbour."

"Our only one, by Jove!" cried Jack.

"How gallant to forget Julia," said Nelly tartly.

"And the fair Julia,—who is she?" asked Lord Culduff.

"L'Estrange's sister," replied Augustus.

"And now, my lord," chimed in Jack, "you know the whole neighbourhood, if we don't throw in a crossed-grained old fellow, a half-pay lieutenant of the Buffs."

"Small but select," said Lord Culduff quietly. "May I venture to ask you, Colonel Bramleigh, what determined you in your choice of a residence here?"

"I suppose I must confess it was mainly a money consideration. The bank held some rather heavy mortgages over this property, which they were somewhat disposed to consider as capable of great improvement, and as I was growing a little wearied of City life, I fancied I'd come over here and——"

"Regenerate Ireland, eh?"

"Or, at least, live very enonomically," added he, laughing.

"I may be permitted to doubt that part of the experiment," said Lord Culduff, as his eyes ranged over the table set forth in all the splendour that plate and glass could bestow.

"I suspect papa means a relative economy," said Marion, "something very different from our late life in England."

"Yes, my last three years have been very costly

ones," said Colonel Bramleigh, sighing. "I lost heavily by the sale of Earlshope, and my unfortunate election too was an expensive business. It will take some retrenchment to make up for all this. I tell the boys they'll have to sell their hunters, or be satisfied, like the parson, to hunt one day a week." The self-complacent, mock humility of this speech was all too apparent.

"I take it," said Culduff authoritatively, "that every gentleman"—and he laid a marked emphasis on the "gentleman"—"must at some period or other of his life have spent more money than he ought, more than was subsequently found to be convenient."

"I have repeatedly done so," broke in Cutbill, "and invariably been sorry for it afterwards, inasmuch as each time one does it the difficulty increases."

"Harder to get credit, you mean?" cried Jack, laughing.

"Just so; and one's friends get tired of helping one. Just as they told me, there was a fellow at Blackwall used to live by drowning himself. He was regularly fished up once a week and stomach-pumped and 'cordialled' and hot-blanketed, and brought

round by the Humane Society's people, till at last they came to discover the dodge, and refused to restore him any more; and now he 's reduced to earn his bread as a water-bailiff — cruel hard on a fellow of such an ingenious turn of mind."

While the younger men laughed at Cutbill's story, Lord Culduff gave him a reproving glance from the other end of the table, palpably intended to recall him to a more sedate and restricted conviviality.

"Are we not to accompany you?" said Lord Culduff to Marion, as she and her sister arose to retire. "Is this barbarism of sitting after dinner maintained here?"

"Only till we finish this decanter of claret, my lord," said Colonel Bramleigh, who caught what was not intended for his ears.

"Ask the governor to give you a cigar," whispered Jack to Cutbill; "he has some rare Cubans."

"Now, this is what I call regular jolly," said Cutbill as he drew a small spider table to his side, and furnished himself with a glass and a decanter of Madeira, "and," added he in a whisper to Jack, "let us not be in a hurry to leave it. We only want one thing to be perfect, Colonel Bramleigh."

"If I can only supply it, pray command me, Mr. Cutbill."

"I want this, then," said Cutbill, pursing up his mouth at one side, while he opened the other as if to emit the smoke of a cigar.

"Do you mean smoking?" asked Colonel Bramleigh, in a half irritable tone.

"You have it."

"Are you a smoker my lord?" asked the host, turning to Lord Culduff.

"A very moderate one. A cigarette after breakfast, and another at bed-time, are about my excesses in that direction."

"Then I'm afraid I must defraud you of the full measure of your enjoyment, Mr. Cutbill; we never smoke in the dining-room. Indeed, I myself have a strong aversion to tobacco, and though I have consented to build a smoking-room, it is as far off from me as I have been able to contrive it."

"And what about his choice Cubans, eh?" whispered Cutbill to Jack.

"All hypocrisy. You'll find a box of them in your dressing-room," said Jack, in an undertone, "when you go upstairs."

Temple now led his distinguished friend into those charming pasturages where the flocks of diplomacy love to dwell, and where none other save themselves could find herbage. Nor was it amongst great political events, of peace or war, alliances or treaties, they wandered—for perhaps in these the outer world, taught as they are by newspapers, might have taken some interest and some share. No; their talk was all of personalities, of Russian princes and grandees of Spain, archduchesses and "marchesas," whose crafts and subtleties, and pomps and vanities, make up a world like no other world and play a drama of life—happily, it may be for humanity,—like no other drama that other men and women ever figured in. Now it is a strange fact—and I appeal to my readers if their experience will not corroborate mine—that when two men thoroughly versed in these themes will talk together upon them, exchanging their stories and mingling their comments, the rest of the company will be struck with a perfect silence, unable to join in the subject discussed, and half ashamed to introduce any ordinary matter into such high and distinguished society. And thus Lord Culduff and Temple went on for full an hour or

more, pelting each other with little court scandals and small state intrigues, till Colonel Bramleigh fell asleep, and Cutbill, having finished his Madeira, would probably have followed his host's example, when a servant announced tea, adding in a whisper, that Mr. L'Estrange and his sister were in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER IX.

OVER THE FIRE.

In a large room, comfortably furnished, but in which there was a certain blending of the articles of the drawing-room with those of the dining-room, showing umistakably the bachelor character of the owner, sat two young men at opposite sides of an ample fireplace. One sat, or rather reclined, on a small leather sofa, his bandaged leg resting on a pillow, and his pale and somewhat shrunken face evidencing the results of pain and confinement to the house. His close-cropt head and square-cut beard, and a certain mingled drollery and fierceness in the eyes, proclaimed him French, and so M. Anatole Pracontal was; though it would have been difficult to declare as much from his English, which he spoke with singular purity and the very faintest peculiarity of accent.

Opposite him sat a tall well-built man of about

thirty-four or five, with regular and almost handsome features, marred, indeed, in expression by the extreme closeness of the eyes, and a somewhat long upper lip, which latter defect an incipient moustache was already concealing. The colour of his hair was however that shade of auburn which verges on red, and is so commonly accompained by a much freckled skin. This same hair, and hands and feet almost enormous in size, were the afflictions which imparted bitterness to a lot which many regarded as very enviable in life; for Mr. Philip Longworth was his own master, free to go where he pleased, and the owner of a very sufficient fortune. He had been brought up at Oscot, and imbibed, with a very fair share of knowledge, a large stock of that general mistrust and suspicion which is the fortune of those entrusted to priestly teaching, and which, though he had travelled largely and mixed freely with the world, still continued to cling to his manner, which might be characterized by the one word—furtive.

Longworth had only arrived that day for dinner, and the two friends were now exchanging their experience since they had parted some eight months before at the second cataract of the Nile.

"And so, Pracontal, you never got one of my letters?"

"Not one,—on my honour. Indeed, if it were not that I learned by a chance meeting with a party of English tourists at Cannes that they had met you at Cairo, I'd have begun to suspect you had taken a plunge into the Nile, or into Mohammedom, for which latter you were showing some disposition, you remember, when we parted."

"True enough; and if one was sure never to turn westward again, there are many things in favour of the turban. It is the most sublime conception of egotism possible to imagine."

"Egotism is a mistake, mon cher," said the other; "a man's own heart, make it as comfortable as he may, is too small an apartment to live in. I do not say this in any grand benevolent spirit. There's no humbug of philanthropy in the opinion."

"Of that I'm fully assured," said Longworth, with a gravity which made the other laugh.

"No," continued he, still laughing. "I want a larger field, a wider hunting-ground for my diversion than my own nature."

"A disciple, in fact, of your great model, Louis

Napoleon. You incline to annexations. By the way, how fares it with your new projects? Have you seen the lawyer I gave you the letter to?"

"Yes. I stayed eight days in town to confer with him. I heard from him this very day."

"Well, what says he?"

"His letter is a very savage one. He is angry with me for having come here at all; and particularly angry because I have broken my leg, and can't come away."

"What does he think of your case, however?"

"He thinks it manageable. He says—as of course I knew he would say—that it demands most cautious treatment and great acuteness. There are blanks, historical blanks, to be filled up; links to connect, and such like, which will demand some time and some money. I have told him I have an inexhaustible supply of the one, but for the other I am occasionally slightly pinched."

"It promises well, however?"

"Most hopefully. And when once I have proved myself—not always so easy, as it seems—the son of my father, I am to go over and see him again in consultation."

"Kelson is a man of station and character, and if he undertakes your cause it is in itself a strong guarantee of its goodness."

"Why, these men take all that is offered them. They no more refuse a bad suit than a doctor rejects a hopeless patient."

"And so will a doctor, if he happen to be an honest man," said Longworth, half peevishly. "Just as he would also refuse to treat one who would persist in following his own caprices in defiance of all advice."

"Which touches me. Is not it so?" said the other laughing. "Well, I think I ought to have stayed quietly here, and not shown myself in public. All the more, since it has cost me this," and he pointed to his leg as he spoke. "But I can't help confessing it, Philip, the sight of those fellows in their gay scarlet, caracolling over the sward, and popping over the walls and hedges, provoked me. It was exactly like a challenge; so I felt it, at least. It was as though they said, 'What! you come here to pit your claims against ours, and you are still not gentleman enough to meet us in a fair field and face the same perils that we do.' And this, be it

remembered, to one who had served in a cavalry regiment, and made campaigns with the Chasseurs d'Afrique. I couldn't stand it, and after the second day I mounted, and—" a motion of his hand finished the sentence.

"All that sort of reasoning is so totally different from an Englishman's that I am unable even to discuss it. I do not pretend to understand the refined sensibility that resents provocations which were never offered."

"I know you don't, and I know your countrymen do not either. You are such a practical people that your very policemen never interfere with a criminal till he has fully committed himself."

"In plain words, we do not content ourselves with inferences. But tell me, did any of these people call to see you, or ask after you?"

"Yes, they sent the day after my disaster, and they also told the doctor to say how happy they should be if they could be of service to me. And a young naval commander,—his card is yonder,—came I think three times, and would have come up if I had wished to receive him; but Kelson's letter, so angry about my great indiscretion as he called

it, made me decline the visit, and confine my acknowledgment to thanks."

"I wonder what my old gatekeeper thought when he saw them, or their liveries, in this avenue?" said Longworth, with a peculiar bitterness in his tone.

"Why, what should he think,—was there any feud between the families?"

"How could there be? These people have not been many months in Ireland. What I meant was with reference to the feud that is six centuries old, the old open ulcer, that makes all rule in this country a struggle, and all resistance to it a patriotism. Don't you know," asked he, almost sternly, "that I am a Papist?"

"Yes, you told me so."

"And don't you know that my religion is not a mere barrier to my advancement in many careers of life, but is a social disqualification—that it is, like the trace of black blood in a creole, a ban excluding him from intercourse with his better-born neighbours —that I belong to a class just as much shut out from all the relations of society, as were the Jews in the fifteenth century?"

"I remember that you told me so once, but I

own I never fully comprehended it, nor understood how the question of a man's faith was to decide his standing in this world, and that, being the equal of those about you in birth and condition, your religion should stamp you with inferiority."

"But I did not tell you I was their equal," said Longworth, with a slow and painful distinctness. "We are novi homines here; a couple of generations back we were peasants,—as poor as anything you could see out of that window. By hard work and some good luck—of course there was luck in it—we emerged, and got enough together to live upon, and I was sent to a costly school, and then to college, that I might start in life the equal of my fellows. But what avails it all? To hold a station in life, to mix with the world, to associate with men educated and brought up like myself, I must quit my own country and live abroad. I know, I see, you can make nothing of this. It is out and out incomprehensible. You made a clean sweep of these things with your great Revolution of '93. Ours is yet to come."

"Per Dio! I'd not stand it," cried the other passionately.

"You couldn't help it. You must stand it; at least, till such time as a good many others, equally aggrieved as yourself, resolve to risk something to change it; and this is remote enough, for there is nothing that men,—I mean educated and cultivated men,—are more averse to, than any open confession of feeling a social disqualification. I may tell it to you here, as we sit over the fire, but I'll not go out and proclaim it, I promise you. These are confessions one keeps for the fireside."

"And will not these people visit you?"

"Nothing less likely."

"Nor you call upon them?"

"Certainly not."

"And will you continue to live within an hour's drive of each other without acquaintance or recognition?"

"Probably,—at least we may salute when we meet."

"Then I say the guillotine has done more for civilization than the schoolmaster," cried the other. "And all this because you are a Papist?"

"Just so. I belong to a faith so deeply associated with a bygone inferiority that I am not to be

permitted to emerge from it,—there's the secret of it all."

"I'd rebel. I'd descend into the streets!"

"And you'd get hanged for your pains."

A shrug of the shoulders was all the reply, and Longworth went on:—

"Some one once said, 'It was better economy in a state to teach people not to steal than to build gaols for the thieves;' and so I would say to our rulers it would be cheaper to give us some of the things we ask for than to enact all the expensive measures that are taken to repress us."

"What chance have I then of justice in such a country?" cried the foreigner passionately.

"Better than in any land of Europe. Indeed I will go further, and say it is the one land in Europe where corruption is impossible on the seat of judgment. If you make out your claim, as fully as you detailed it to me, if evidence will sustain your allegations, your flag will as certainly wave over that high tower yonder as that decanter stands there."

"Here's to *la bonne chance*," said the other, filling a bumper and drinking it off.

"You will need to be very prudent, very

circumspect: two things which I suspect will cost you some trouble," said Longworth. "The very name you will have to go by will be a difficulty. To call yourself Bramleigh will be an open declaration of war; to write yourself Pracontal is an admission that you have no claim to the other appellation."

"It was my mother's name. She was of a Provençal family, and the Pracontals were people of good blood."

"But your father was always called Bramleigh?"

"My father, *mon cher*, had fifty aliases; he was Louis Lagrange under the Empire, Victor Cassagnac at the Restoration, Carlo Salvi when sentenced to the galleys at Naples, Niccolo Baldassare when he shot the Austrian colonel at Capua, and I believe when he was last heard of, the captain of a slaver, he was called, for shortness' sake, 'Brutto,' for he was not personally attractive."

"Then when and where was he known as Bramleigh?"

"Whenever he wrote to England. Whenever he asked for money, which, on the whole, was pretty often, he was Montagu Bramleigh."

"To whom were these letters addressed?"

"To his father, Montagu Bramleigh, Portland Place, London. I have it all in my note-book."

"And these appeals were responded to?"

"Not so satisfactorily as one might wish. The replies were flat refusals to give money, and rather unpleasant menaces as to police measures if the insistance were continued."

"You have some of these letters?"

"The lawyer has, I think, four of them. The last contained a bank order for five hundred francs, payable to Giacomo Lami, or order."

"Who was Lami?"

"Lami was the name of my grandmother; her father was Giacomo. He was the old fresco-painter who came over from Rome to paint the walls of that great house yonder, and it was his daughter that Bramleigh married."

"Which Bramleigh was the father of the present possessor of Castello?"

"Precisely. Montagu Bramleigh married my grandmother here in Ireland, and when the troubles broke out, either to save her father from the laws or to get rid of him, managed to smuggle him out of the country over to Holland,—the last supposition, and

the more likely, is that he sent his wife off with her father."

"What evidence is there of this marriage?"

"It was registered in some parish authority; at least so old Giacomo's journal records, for we have the journal, and without it we might never have known of our claim; but besides that, there are two letters of Montagu Bramleigh's to my grandmother, written when he had occasion to leave her about ten days after their marriage, and they begin, 'My dearest wife,' and are signed, 'Your affectionate husband, M. Bramleigh.' The lawyer has all these."

"How did it come about that a rich London banker, as Bramleigh was, should ally himself with the daughter of a working Italian tradesman?"

"Here's the story, as conveyed by old Giacomo's notes. Bramleigh came over here to look after the progress of the works for a great man, a bishop and a lord marquis too, who was the owner of the place; he made the acquaintance of Lami and his daughters: there were two; the younger only a child, however. The eldest, Enrichetta, was very beautiful, so beautiful indeed, that Giacomo was eternally introducing her head into all his frescoes; she was a blonde

Italian, and made a most lovely Madonna. Old Giacomo's journal mentions no less than eight altar-pieces where she figures, not to say that she takes her place pretty frequently in heathen society also, and if I be rightly informed, she is the centre figure of a 'fresco' in this very house of Castello, in a small octagon tower, the whole of which Lami painted with his own hand. Bramleigh fell in love with this girl and married her."

"But she was a Catholic."

"No. Lami was originally a Waldensian, and held some sort of faith, I don't exactly know what, that claimed affinity with the English church; at all events, the vicar here, a certain Robert Mathews,—his name is in the precious journal,—married them, and man and wife they were."

"When and how did all these facts come to your knowledge?"

"As to the when and the how, the same answer will suffice. I was serving as sous-lieutenant of cavalry in Africa when news reached me that the *Astradella*, the ship in which my father sailed, was lost off the Cape Verde islands, with all on board. I hastened off to Naples, where a Mr. Bolton lived,

who was chief owner of the vessel, to hear what tidings had reached him of the disaster, and to learn something of my father's affairs, for he had been, if I might employ so fine a word for so small a function, his banker for years. Indeed, but for Bolton's friendship and protection—how earned I never knew—my father would have come to grief years before, for he was a thorough Italian, and always up to the neck in conspiracies; he had been in that Bonapartist affair at Rome; was a Carbonaro and a Camorrist, and heaven knows what besides. And though Bolton was a man very unlikely to sympathize with these opinions, I take it my respected parent must have been a *bon diable* that men who knew him would not willingly see wrecked and ruined. Bolton was most kind to myself personally. He received me with many signs of friendship, and without troubling me with any more details of law than were positively unavoidable, put me in possession of the little my father had left behind him, which consisted of a few hundred francs of savings and an old chest, with some older clothes and a mass of papers and letters—dangerous enough, as I discovered, to have compromised scores of people—and a strange old manuscript book, clasped

and locked, called the *Diary of Giacomo Lami*, with matter in it for half-a-dozen romances; for Giacomo, too, had the conspirator's taste, had known Danton intimately, and was deep in the confidence of all the Irish republicans who were affiliated with the French revolutionary party. But besides this the book contained a quantity of original letters; and when mention was made in the text of this or that event, the letter which related to it, or replied to some communication about it, was appended in the original. I made this curious volume my study for weeks, till, in fact, I came to know far more about old Giacomo and his times than I ever knew about my father and his epoch. There was not a country in Europe in which he had not lived, nor, I believe, one in which he had not involved himself in some trouble. He loved his art, but he loved political plotting and conspiracy even more, and was ever ready to resign his most profitable engagement for a scheme that promised to overturn a government or unthrone a sovereign. My first thought on reading his curious reminiscences was to make them the basis of a memoir for publication. Of course they were fearfully indiscreet, and involved reputations that no one had ever thought

of assailing; but they were chiefly of persons dead and gone, and it was only their memory that could suffer. I spoke to Bolton about this. He approved of the notion, principally as a means of helping me to a little money, which I stood much in need of, and gave me a letter to a friend in Paris, the well-known publisher Lecoq, of the Rue St. Honoré.

"As I was dealing with a man of honour and high character, I had no scruple in leaving the volume of old Giacomo's memoirs in Lecoq's hands; and after about a week I returned to learn what he thought of it. He was frank enough to say that no such diary had ever come before him—that it cleared up a vast number of points hitherto doubtful and obscure, and showed an amount of knowledge of the private life of the period absolutely marvellous; 'but,' said he, 'it would never do to make it public. Most of these men are now forgotten, it is true, but their descendants remain, and live in honour amongst us. What a terrible scandal it would be to proclaim to the world that of these people many were illegitimate, many in the enjoyment of large fortunes to which they had not a shadow of a title; in fact,' said he, 'it would be to hurl a live shell in the very

midst of society, leaving the havoc and destruction it might cause to blind chance. But,' added he, 'it strikes me there is a more profitable use the volume might be put to. Have you read the narrative of your grandmother's marriage in Ireland with that rich Englishman? I owned I had read it carelessly, and without bestowing much interest on the theme. 'Go back and re-read it,' said he, 'and come and talk it over with me to-morrow evening.' As I entered his room the next night he arose ceremoniously from his chair, and said, in a tone of well-assumed obsequiousness, 'Si je ne me trompe pas, j'ai l'honneur de voir Monsieur Bramleigh, n'est-ce pas?' I laughed, and replied, 'Je ne m'y oppose pas, Monsieur;' and we at once launched out into the details of the story, of which each of us had formed precisely the same opinion.

"Ill luck would have it, that as I went back to my lodgings on that night I should meet Bertani, and Varese, and Manini, and be persuaded to go and sup with them. They were all suspected by the police, from their connection with Fieschi; and on the morning after I received an order from the Minister of War to join my regiment at Oran, and an intimation that my character being fully known,

it behoved me to take care. I gave no grounds for more stringent measures towards me. I understood the 'caution,' and, not wishing to compromise M. Lecoq, who had been so friendly in all his relations with me, I left France, without even an opportunity of getting back my precious volume, which I never saw again till I revisited Paris eight years after, having given in my démission from the service. Lecoq obtained for me that small appointment I held under M. Lesseps in Egypt, and which I had given up a few weeks before I met you on the Nile. I ought to tell you that Lecoq, for what reason I can't tell, was not so fully persuaded that my claim was as direct as he had at first thought it; and indeed his advice to me was rather to address myself seriously to some means of livelihood, or to try and make some compromise with the Bramleighs, with whom he deemed a mere penniless pretender would not have the smallest chance of success. I hesitated a good deal over his counsel. There was much in it that weighed with me, perhaps convinced me; but I was always more or less of a gambler, and more than once have I risked a stake, which, if I lost, would have left me penniless; and at last I resolved to say,

Va Banque, here goes; all or nothing. There's my story, mon cher, without any digressions, even one of which, if I had permitted myself to be led into it, would have proved twice as long."

"The strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link, the engineers tell us," said Longworth, "and it is the same with evidence. I'd like to hear what Kelson says of the case."

"That I can scarcely give you. His last letter to me is full of questions which I cannot answer; but you shall read it for yourself. Will you send upstairs for my writing-desk?"

"We'll con that over to-morrow after breakfast, when our heads will be clearer and brighter. Have you old Lami's journal with you?"

"No. All my papers are with Kelson. The only thing I have here is a sketch in coloured chalk of my grandmother, in her eighteenth year, as a Flora, and, from the date, it must have been done in Ireland, when Giacomo was working at the frescoes."

"That my father," said 'Pracontal, after a pause, "counted with certainty on this succession all his own papers show, as well as the care he bestowed on my early education, and the importance he attached

to my knowing and speaking English perfectly. But my father cared far more for a conspiracy than a fortune. He was one of those men who only seem to live when they are confronted by a great danger, and I believe there has not been a great plot in Europe these last five-and-thirty years without his name being in it. He was twice handed over to the French authorities by the English Government, and there is some reason to believe that the Bramleighs were the secret instigators of the extradition. There was no easier way of getting rid of his claims."

"These are disabilities which do not attach to you."

"No, thank heaven. I have gone no farther with these men than mere acquaintance. I know them all, and they know me well enough to know that I deem it the greatest disaster of my life that my father was one of them. It is not too much to say that a small part of the energy he bestowed on schemes of peril and ruin would have sufficed to have vindicated his claim to wealth and fortune."

"You told me, I think, that Kelson hinted at the possibility of some compromise,—something which, sparing *them* the penalty of publicity, would still secure to *you* an ample fortune."

"Yes. What he said was, 'Juries are, with all their honesty of intention, capricious things to trust to;' and that, not being rich enough to suffer repeated defeats, an adverse verdict might be fatal to me. I didn't like the reasoning altogether, but I was so completely in his hands that I forbore to make any objection, and so the matter remained."

"I suspect he was right," said Longworth, thoughtfully. "At the same time, the case must be strong enough to promise victory, to sustain the proposal of a compromise."

"And if I can show the game in my hand why should I not claim the stakes?"

"Because the other party may delay the settlement. They may challenge the cards, accuse you of 'a rook,' put out the lights, anything, in short, that shall break up the game,"

"I see," said Pracontal, gravely; "the lawyer's notion may be better than I thought it."

A long silence ensued between them, then Longworth, looking at his watch, exclaimed, "Who'd believe it? It wants only a few minutes to two o'clock. Good-night."

CHAPTER X.

THE DROPPINGS OF A GREAT DIPLOMATIST.

WHEN a man's manner and address are very successful with the world—when he possesses that power of captivation which extends to people of totally different tastes and habits, and is equally at home, equally at his ease, with young and old, with men of grave pursuits and men of pleasure—it is somewhat hard to believe that there must not be some strong sterling quality in his nature; for we know that the base metals never bear gilding, and that it is only a waste of gold to cover them with it.

It would be, therefore, very pleasant to think that if people should not be altogether as admirable as they were agreeable, yet that the qualities which made the companionship so delightful should be indications of deeper and more solid gifts beneath. Yet I am afraid the theory will not hold. I suspect

that there are a considerable number of people in this world who go through life trading on credit, and who renew their bills with humanity so gracefully and so cleverly, they are never found out to be bankrupts till they die.

A very accomplished specimen of this order was Lord Culduff. He was a man of very ordinary abilities, commonplace in every way, and who had yet contrived to impress the world with the notion of his capacity. He did a little of almost everything. He sang a little, played a little on two or three instruments, talked a little of several languages, and had smatterings of all games and field-sports, so that to every seeming, nothing came amiss to him. Nature had been gracious to him personally, and he had a voice very soft and low and insinuating.

He was not an impostor, for the simple reason that he believed in himself. He actually had negotiated his false coinage so long that he got to regard it as bullion, and imagined himself to be one of the first men of his age.

The bad bank-note, which has been circulating freely from hand to hand, no sooner comes under the scrutiny of a sharp-eyed functionary of the bank than

it is denounced and branded; and so Culduff would speedily have been treated by any one of those keen men who, as Ministers, grow to acquire a knowledge of human nature as thorough as of the actual events of the time.

The world at large, however, had not this estimate of him. They read of him as a special envoy here, an extraordinary minister there, now negotiating a secret treaty, now investing a Pasha of Egypt with the Bath; and they deemed him not only a trusty servant of the Crown, but a skilled negotiator, a deep and accomplished diplomatist.

He was a little short-sighted, and it enabled him to pass objectionable people without causing offence. He was slightly deaf, and it gave him an air of deference in conversation which many were charmed with; for whenever he failed to catch what was said, his smile was perfectly captivating. It was assent, but dashed with a sort of sly flattery, as though it was to the speaker's ingenuity he yielded, as much as to the force of the conviction.

He was a great favourite with women. Old ladies regarded him as a model of good *ton;* younger ones discovered other qualities in him that amused them

as much. His life had been anything but blameless, but he had contrived to make the world believe he was more sinned against than sinning, and that every mischance that befell him came of that unsuspecting nature and easy disposition of which even all his experience of life could not rob him.

Cutbill read him thoroughly: but though Lord Culduff saw this, it did not prevent him trying all his little pretty devices of pleasing on the man of culverts and cuttings. In fact, he seemed to feel that though he could not bring down the bird, it was better not to spoil his gun by a change of cartridge, and so he fired away his usual little pleasantries, well aware that none of them were successful.

He had now been three days with the Bramleighs, and certainly had won the suffrages, though in different degrees, of them all. He had put himself so frankly and unreservedly in Colonel Bramleigh's hands about the coal-mine, candidly confessing the whole thing was new to him, he was a child in money matters, that the banker was positively delighted with him.

With Augustus he had talked politics confidentially,—not questions of policy nor statecraft, not

matters of legislation or government, but the more subtle and ingenious points as to what party a young man entering life ought to join, what set he should attach himself to, and what line he should take to insure future distinction and office. He was well up in the gossip of the House, and knew who was disgusted with such an one, and why so-and-so "wouldn't stand it" any longer.

To Temple Bramleigh he was charming. Of the "line," as they love to call it, he knew positively everything. Nor was it merely how this or that legation was conducted, how this man got on with his chief, or why that other had asked to be transferred; but he knew all the mysterious goings-on of that wonderful old repository they call "the Office." "That's what you must look to, Bramleigh," he would say, clapping him on the shoulder. "The men who make plenipos and envoys are not in the Cabinet, nor do they dine at Osborne; they are fellows in seedy black, with brown umbrellas, who cross the Green Park every morning about eleven o'clock, and come back over the self-same track by six of an evening. Staid old dogs, with crape on their hats, and hard lines round their mouths, fond

of fresh caviare from Russia, and much given to cursing the messengers."

He was, in a word, the incarnation of a very well-bred selfishness, that had learned how much it redounds to a man's personal comfort that he is popular, and that even a weak swimmer who goes with the tide, makes a better figure than the strongest and bravest who attempts to stem the current. He was, in his way, a keen observer, and a certain haughty tone, a kind of self-assertion in Marion's manner, so distinguished her from her sister, that he set Cutbill to ascertain if it had any other foundation than mere temperament; and the wily agent was not long in learning that a legacy of twenty thousand pounds in her own absolute right from her mother's side accounted for these pretensions.

"I tell you, Cutty, it's only an old diplomatist, like myself, would have detected the share that bank debentures had in that girl's demeanour. Confess, sir, it was a clever hit."

"It was certainly neat, my lord."

"It was more, Cutty; it was deep—downright deep. I saw where the idiosyncrasy stopped, and where the dividends came in."

Cutbill smiled an approving smile, and his lordship turned to the glass over the chimney-piece and looked admiringly at himself. "Was it twenty thousand you said?" asked he, indolently.

"Yes, my lord, twenty. Her father will probably give her as much more. Harding told me yesterday that all the younger children are to have share and share alike—no distinction made between sons and daughters."

"So that she'll have what a Frenchman would call 'un million de dot.'"

"Just about what we want, my lord, to start our enterprise."

"Ah, yes. I suppose that would do; but we shall do this by a company, Cutty. Have you said anything to Bramleigh yet on the subject?"

"Nothing further than what I told you yesterday. I gave him the papers with the surveys and the specifications, and he said he'd look over them this morning, and that I might drop in upon him to-night in the library after ten. It is the time he likes best for a little quiet chat."

"He seems a very cautious, I'd almost say, a timid man."

"The City men are all like that, my lord. They're always cold enough in entering on a project, though they'll go rashly on after they've put their money in it."

"What's the eldest son?"

"A fool—just a fool. He urged his father to contest a county, to lay a claim for a peerage. They lost the election and lost their money; but Augustus Bramleigh persists in thinking that the party are still their debtors."

"Very hard to make Ministers believe that," said Culduff, with a grin. "A vote in the House is like a bird in the hand. The second fellow, Temple, is a poor creature."

"Ain't he? Not that he thinks so."

"No; they never do," said Culduff, caressing his whiskers, and looking pleasantly at himself in the glass. "They see one or two men of mark in their career, and they fancy—heaven knows why—that they must be like them; that identity of pursuit implies equality of intellect; and so these creatures spread out their little sails, and imagine they are going to make a grand voyage."

"But Miss Bramleigh told me yesterday you had a high opinion of her brother Temple."

"I believe I said so," said he, with a soft smile. "One says these sort of things every day, irresponsibly, Cutty, irresponsibly, just as one gives his autograph, but would think twice before signing his name on a stamped paper."

Mr. Cutbill laughed at this sally, and seemed by the motion of his lips as though he were repeating it to himself for future retail; but in what spirit, it would not be safe perhaps to inquire.

Though Lord Culduff did not present himself at the family breakfast-table, and but rarely appeared at luncheon, pretexting that his mornings were always given up to business and letter-writing, he usually came down in the afternoon in some toilet admirably suited to the occasion, whatever it might be, of riding, driving, or walking. In fact, a mere glance at his lordship's costume would have unmistakably shown whether a canter, the croquêt lawn, or a brisk walk through the shrubberies, were in the order of the day.

"Do you remember, Cutty," said he suddenly, "what was my engagement for this morning? I promised somebody to go somewhere and do something; and I'll be shot if I can recollect."

"I am totally unable to assist your lordship," said the other with a smile. "The young men, I know, are out shooting, and Miss Eleanor Bramleigh is profiting by the snow to have a day's sledging. She proposed to me to join her, but I didn't see it."

"Ah! I have it now, Cutty. I was to walk over to Portshandon, to return the curate's call. Miss Bramleigh was to come with me."

"It was scarcely gallant, my lord, to forget so charming a project," said the other slyly.

"Gallantry went out, Cutty, with slashed doublets. The height and the boast of our modern civilization is to make women our perfect equals, and to play the game of life with them on an absolutely equal footing."

"Is that quite fair?"

"I protest I think it is, except in a few rare instances, where the men unite to the hardier qualities of the masculine intelligence, the nicer, finer, most susceptible instincts of the other sex—the organization that more than any other touches on excellence;—except, I say, in these cases, the women have the best of it. Now what chance, I

ask you, would *you* have, pitted against such a girl as the elder Bramleigh?"

"I'm afraid a very poor one," said Cutbill, with a look of deep humility.

"Just so, Cutty, a very poor one. I give you my word of honour I have learned more diplomacy beside the drawing-room fire than I ever acquired in the pages of the blue-books. You see it's a quite different school of fence they practise; the thrusts are different and the guards are different. A day for furs essentially, a day for furs," broke he in, as he drew on a coat lined with sable, and profusely braided and ornamented. "What was I saying? where were we?"

"You were talking of women, my lord."

"The faintest tint of scarlet in the under vest—it was a device of the Regent's in his really great day—is always effective in cold, bright, frosty weather. The tint is carried on to the cheek, and adds brilliancy to the eye. In duller weather a coral pin in the cravat will suffice; but, as David Wilkie used to say, 'Nature must have her bit of red.'"

"I wish you would finish what you were saying

about women, my lord. Your remarks were full of originality."

"Finish! finish, Cutty! It would take as many volumes as the 'Abridgment of the Statutes' to contain one-half of what I could say about them; and, after all, it would be Sanscrit to you." His lordship now placed his hat on his head, slightly on one side. It was the "tigerism" of a past period, and which he could no more abandon than he could give up the jaunty swagger of his walk, or the bland smile which he kept ready for recognition.

"I have not, I rejoice to say, arrived at that time of life when I can affect to praise bygones; but I own, Cutty, they did everything much better five-and-twenty years ago than now. They dined better, they dressed better, they drove better, they turned out better in the field and in the park, and they talked better."

"How do you account for this, my lord?"

"Simply in this way, Cutty. We have lowered our standard in taste just as we have lowered our standard for the army. We take fellows five feet seven into grenadier companies now; that is, we admit into society men of mere wealth—the banker,

the brewer, the railway director, and the rest of them; and with these people we admit their ways, their tastes, their very expressions. I know it is said that we gain in breadth: yet, as I told Lord Cocklethorpe, (the mot had its success,) what we gain in breadth, said I, we lose in height. Neat, Cutty, wasn't it? As neat as a mot well can be in our clumsy language." And with this, and a familiar "bye bye," he strolled away, leaving Cutbill to practise before the glass such an imitation of him as might serve, at some future time, to convulse with laughter a select and admiring audience.

CHAPTER XI.

A WINTER DAY'S WALK.'

Lord Culduff and Marion set out for their walk. It was a sharp frosty morning, with a blue sky above and crisp snow beneath. We have already seen that his lordship had not been inattentive to the charms of costume. Marion was no less so; her dark silk dress, looped over a scarlet petticoat, and a tasteful hat of black astracan, well suited the character of looks where the striking and brilliant were as conspicuous as dark eyes, long lashes, and a bright complexion could make them.

"I'll take you by the shrubberies, my lord, which is somewhat longer, but pleasanter walking, and if you like it, we'll come back by the hill path, which is much shorter."

"The longer the road the more of your company,

"It is my own temper too," she added. "You may convince; you cannot coerce me."

"I wish I might try the former," said he, in a tone of much meaning.

"We agree in so many things, my lord," said she, laughingly, "that there is little occasion for your persuasive power. There, do you see that smoke-wreath yonder? that's from the cottage where we're going."

"I wish I knew where we were going," said he, with a sigh of wonderful tenderness.

"To Roseneath, my lord. I told you the L'Estranges lived there."

"Yes: but it was not that I meant," added he, feelingly.

"And a pretty spot it is," continued she, purposely misunderstanding him; "so sheltered and secluded. By the way, what do you think of the curate's sister? She is very beautiful, isn't she?"

"Am I to say the truth?"

"Of course you are."

"I mean, may I speak as though we knew each other very well, and could talk in confidence together?"

"That is what I mean."

"And wish?" added he.

"Well, and wish, if you will supply the word."

"If I am to be frank, then, I don't admire her."

"Not think her beautiful?"

"Yes; there is some beauty—a good deal of beauty, if you like; but somehow it is not allied with that brightness that seems to accentuate beauty. She is tame and cold."

"I think men generally accuse her of coquetry."

"And there is coquetry too; but of that character the French call *minauderie*, the weapon of a very small enchantress, I assure you."

"You are, then, for the captivations that give no quarter?" said she, smiling.

"It is a glory to be so vanquished," said he, heroically.

"My sister declared the other night, after Julia had sung that barcarole, that you were fatally smitten."

"And did you concur in the judgment?" asked he, tenderly.

"At first, perhaps I did, but when I came to know you a little better——"

"After our talk on the terrace?"

"And even before that. When Julia was singing for you,—clearly for you, there was no disguise in the matter, and I whispered you, 'What courage you have!' you said, 'I have been so often under fire,'—from that instant I knew you."

"Knew me,—how far?"

"Enough to know that it was not to such captivations you would yield,—that you had seen a great deal of that sort of thing."

"Oh, have I not!"

"Perhaps not always unscathed," said she, with a sly glance.

"I will scarcely go that far," replied he, with the air of a man on the best possible terms with himself. "They say he is the best rider who has had the most falls. At least, it may be said that he who has met no disasters has encountered few perils."

"Now, my lord, you can see the cottage completely. Is it not very pretty, and very picturesque, and is there not something very interesting,—touching almost, in the thought of beauty and captivation,—dwelling in this untravelled wilderness?"

He almost gave a little shudder, as his eye

followed the line of the rugged mountain, till it blended with the bleak and shingly shore on which the waves were now washing in measured plash,—the one sound in the universal silence around.

"Nothing but being desperately in love could make this solitude endurable," said he at last.

"Why not try that resource, my lord? I could almost promise you that the young lady who lives yonder is quite ready to be adored and worshipped, and all that sort of thing; and it would be such a boon on the frosty days, when the ground is too hard for hunting, to have this little bit of romance awaiting you."

"Coquetry and French cookery pall upon a man who has lived all his life abroad, and he actually longs for a little plain diet, in manners as well as meals."

"And then you have seen all the pretty acts of our very pretty neighbour so much better done."

"Done by real artists," added he.

"Just so. Amateurship is always a poor thing. This is the way, my lord. If you will follow me, I will be your guide here; the path is very slippery, and you must take care how you go."

"When I fall, it shall be at your feet," said he, with his hand on his heart.

As they gained the bottom of the little ravine down which the footpath lay, they found Julia, hoe in hand, at work in the garden before the door. Her dark woollen dress and her straw hat were only relieved in colour by a blue ribbon round her throat, but she was slightly flushed by exercise, and a little flurried perhaps by the surprise of seeing them, and her beauty, this time, certainly lacked nothing of that brilliancy which Lord Culduff had pronounced it deficient in.

"My brother will be so sorry to have missed you, my lord," said she, leading the way into the little drawing-room, where, amidst many signs of narrow fortune, there were two or three of those indications which vouch for cultivated tastes and pleasures.

"I had told Lord Culduff so much about your cottage, Julia," said Marion, "that he insisted on coming to see it, without even apprising you of his intention."

"It is just as well," said she artlessly. "A little more or less sun gives the only change in its

appearance. Lord Culduff sees it now as it looks nearly every day."

"And very charming that is," said he, walking to the window and looking out; and then he asked the name of a headland, and how a small rocky island was called, and on which side lay the village of Portshandon, and at what distance was the church, the replies to which seemed to afford him unmixed satisfaction, for as he resumed his seat he muttered several times to himself, "Very delightful indeed; very pleasing in every way."

"Lord Culduff was asking me, as he came along," said Marion, "whether I thought the solitude—I think he called it the savagery of this spot—was likely to be better borne by one native to such wildness, or by one so graced and gifted as yourself, and I protest he puzzled me."

"I used to think it very lonely when I came here first, but I believe I should be sorry to leave it now," said Julia calmly.

"There, my lord," said Marion, "you are to pick your answer out of that."

"As to those resources, which you are so flattering as to call my gifts and graces," said Julia,

laughing, "such of them at least as lighten the solitude were all learned here. I never took to gardening before; I never fed poultry."

"Oh, Julia! have mercy on our illusions."

"You must tell me what they are, before I can spare them. The curate's sister has no claim to be thought an enchanted princess."

"It is all enchantment!" said Lord Culduff, who had only very imperfectly caught what she said.

"Then, I suppose, my lord," said Marion, haughtily, "I ought to rescue you before the spell is complete, as I came here in quality of guide." And she rose as she spoke. "The piano has not been opened to-day, Julia. I take it you seldom sing of a morning."

"Very seldom indeed."

"So I told Lord Culduff; but I promised him his recompence in the evening. You are coming to us to-morrow, ain't you?"

"I fear not. I think George made our excuses. We are to have Mr. Longworth and a French friend of his here with us."

"You see, my lord, what a gay neighbourhood we have; here is a rival dinner-party," said Marion.

"There's no question of a dinner: they come to tea, I assure you," said Julia, laughing.

"No, my lord: it's useless, quite hopeless. I assure you she'll not sing for you of a morning." This speech was addressed to Lord Culduff, as he was turning over some music-books on the piano.

"Have I your permission to look at these?" said he to Julia, as he opened a book of drawings in water-colours.

"Of course, my lord. They are mere sketches taken in the neighbourhood here, and as you will see, very hurriedly done."

"And have you such coast scenery as this?" asked he, in some astonishment, while he held up a rocky headland of several hundred feet, out of the caves at whose base a tumultuous sea was tumbling.

"I could show you finer and bolder bits than even that."

"Do you hear, my lord?" said Marion, in a low tone, only audible to himself. "The fair Julia is offering to be your guide. I'm afraid it is growing late. One does forget time at this cottage. It was only the last day I came here I got scolded for being late at dinner."

And now ensued one of those little bustling scenes of shawling and embracing with which young ladies separate. They talked together, and laughed, and kissed, and answered half-uttered sentences, and even seemed after parting to have something more to say; they were by turns sad, and playful, and saucy —all of these moods being duly accompanied by graceful action, and a chance display of a hand or foot, as it might be, and then they parted.

"Well, my lord," said Marion, as they ascended the steep path that led homewards, "what do you say now? Is Julia as cold and impassive as you pronounced her, or are you ungrateful enough to ignore fascinations all displayed and developed for your own especial captivation?"

"It was very pretty coquetry, all of it," said he, smiling. "Her eyelashes are even longer than I thought them."

"I saw that you remarked them, and she was gracious enough to remain looking at the drawing sufficiently long to allow you full time for the enjoyment."

The steep and rugged paths were quite as much as Lord Culduff could manage without talking, and

he toiled along after her in silence, till they gained the beach.

"At last a bit of even ground," exclaimed he, with a sigh.

"You'll think nothing of the hill, my lord, when you've come it three or four times," said she, with a malicious twinkle of the eye.

"Which is precisely what I have no intention of doing."

"What! not cultivate the acquaintance so auspiciously opened?"

"Not at this price," said he, looking at his splashed boots.

"And that excursion, that ramble, or whatever be the name for it, you were to take together?"

"It is a bliss, I am afraid, I must deny myself."

"You are wrong, my lord; very wrong. My brothers at least assure me that Julia is charming en tête-à-tête. Indeed, Augustus says one does not know her at all till you have passed an hour or two in such confidential intimacy. He says 'she comes out'—whatever that may be—wonderfully.

"Oh, she comes out, does she?" said he, caressing his whiskers.

"That was his phrase for it. I take it to mean that she ventures to talk with a freedom more common on the Continent than in these islands. Is that coming out, my lord?"

"Well, I half suspect it is," said he, smiling faintly.

"And I suppose men like that?"

"I'm afraid, my dear Miss Bramleigh," said he, with a mock air of deploring—"I'm afraid that in these degenerate days men are very prone to like whatever gives them least trouble in everything, and if a woman will condescend to talk to us on our own topics, and treat them pretty much in our own way, we like it, simply because it diminishes the distance between us, and saves us that uphill clamber we are obliged to take when you insist upon our scrambling up to the high level you live in."

"It is somewhat of an ignoble confession you have made there," said she, haughtily.

"I know it—I feel it—I deplore it," said he, affectedly.

"If men will, out of mere indolence—no matter," said she, biting her lip. "I'll not say what I was going to say."

"Pray do. I beseech you finish what you have so well begun."

"Were I to do so, my lord," said she, gravely, "it might finish more than that. It might at least go some way towards finishing our acquaintanceship. I'm sorely afraid you'd not have forgiven me had you heard me out."

"I'd never have forgiven myself, if I were the cause of it."

For some time they walked along in silence, and now the Great House came into view—its windows all glowing and glittering in the blaze of a setting sun, while a faint breeze lazily moved the heavy folds of the enormous flag that floated over the high tower.

"I call that a very princely place," said he, stopping to admire it.

"What a caprice to have built it in such a spot," said she. "The country people were not far wrong when they called it Bishop's Folly."

"They gave it that name, did they?"

"Yes, my lord. It is one of the ways in which humble folk reconcile themselves to lowly fortune; they ridicule their betters." And now she gave a

little low laugh to herself, as if some unuttered notion had just amused her.

"What made you smile?" asked he.

"A very absurd fancy struck me."

"Let me hear it. Why not let me share in its oddity?"

"It might not amuse you as much as it amused me."

"I am the only one who can decide that point."

"Then I'm not so certain it might not annoy you."

"I can assure you on that head," said he gallantly.

"Well, then, you shall hear it. The caprice of a great divine has, so to say, registered itself yonder, and will live, so long as stone and mortar endure, as Bishop's Folly; and I was thinking how strange it would be if another caprice just as unaccountable were to give a name to a less pretentious edifice, and a certain charming cottage be known to posterity as the Viscount's Folly. You're not angry with me, are you?"

"I'd be very angry indeed with you, with myself, and with the whole world, if I thought such a casualty a possibility."

"I assure you, when I said it I didn't believe it, my lord," said she, looking at him with much graciousness; "and, indeed, I would never have uttered the impertinence if you had not forced me. There, there goes the first bell; we shall have short time to dress,"—and with a very meaning smile and a familiar gesture of her hand, she tripped up the steps and disappeared.

"I think I'm all right in that quarter," was his lordship's reflection as he mounted the stairs to his room.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EVENING BELOW AND ABOVE STAIRS.

It was not very willingly that Mr. Cutbill left the drawing-room, where he had been performing a violoncello accompaniment to one of the young ladies in the execution of something very Mendelssohnian and profoundly puzzling to the uninitiated in harmonics. After the peerage he loved counter-point; and it was really hard to tear himself away from passages of almost piercing shrillness, or those still more suggestive moanings of a double bass, to talk stock and share-list with Colonel Bramleigh in the library. Resisting all the assurances that "papa wouldn't mind it; that any other time would do quite as well," and such like, he went up to his room for his books and papers, and then repaired to his rendezvous.

"I'm sorry to take you away from the drawing-

room, Mr. Cutbill," said Bramleigh, as he entered, "but I am half expecting a summons to town, and could not exactly be sure of an opportunity to talk over this matter on which Lord Culduff is very urgent to have my opinion."

"It is not easy, I confess, to tear oneself away from such society. Your daughters are charming musicians, Colonel. Miss Bramleigh's style is as brilliant as Meyer's; and Miss Eleanor has a delicacy of touch I have never heard surpassed."

"This is very flattering, coming from so consummate a judge as yourself."

"All the teaching in the world will not impart that sensitive organization which sends some tones into the heart like the drip, drip of water on a heated brow. Oh, dear! music is too much for me; it totally subverts all my sentiments. I'm not fit for business after it, Colonel Bramleigh, that's the fact."

"Take a glass of that 'Bra Mouton.' You will find it good. It has been eight-and-thirty years in my cellar, and I never think of bringing it out except for a connoisseur in wine."

"Nectar, positively nectar," said he, smacking his lips. "You are quite right not to give this to

the public. They would drink it like a mere full-bodied Bordeaux. That velvety softness,—that subdued strength, faintly recalling Burgundy, and that delicious bouquet, would all be clean thrown away on most people. I declare, I believe a refined palate is just as rare as a correct ear; don't you think so?"

"I'm glad you like the wine. Don't spare it. The cellar is not far off. Now then, let us see. These papers contain Mr. Stebbing's report. I have only glanced my eye over it, but it seems like every other report. They have, I think, a stereotyped formula for these things. They all set out with their bit of geological learning; but you know, Mr. Cutbill, far better than I can tell you, you know sandstone doesn't always mean coal?"

"If it doesn't, it ought to," said Cutbill, with a laugh, for the wine had made him jolly, and familiar besides.

"There are many things in this world which ought to be, but which, unhappily, are not," said Bramleigh, in a tone evidently meant to be half-reproachful. "And as I have already observed to you, mere geological formation is not sufficient. We want the mineral, sir; we want the fact."

"There you have it; there it is for you," said Cutbill, pointing to a somewhat bulky parcel in brown paper in the centre of the table.

"This is not real coal, Mr. Cutbill," said Bramleigh, as he tore open the covering, and exposed a black mis-shapen lump. "You would not call this real coal?"

"I'd not call it Swansea nor Cardiff, Colonel, any more than I'd say the claret we had after dinner to-day was 'Mouton;' but still I'd call each of them very good in their way."

"I return you my thanks, sir, in the name of my wine-merchant. But to come to the coal question, —what could you do with this?"

"What could I do with it? Scores of things,—if I had only enough of it. Burn it in grates—cook with it—smelt metals with it—burn lime with it—drive engines, not locomotives but stationaries, with it. I tell you what, Colonel Bramleigh," said he, with the air of a man who was asserting what he would not suffer to be gainsayed. "It's coal quite enough to start a company on; coal within the meaning of the Act, as the lawyers would say."

"You appear to have rather loose notions of

joint-stock enterprises, Mr. Cutbill," said Bramleigh, haughtily.

"I must say, Colonel, they do not invariably inspire me with sentiments of absolute veneration."

"I hope, however, you feel, sir, that in any enterprise—in any undertaking—where my name is to stand forth, either as promoter or abettor, that the world is to see in such a guarantee, the assurance of solvency and stability."

"That is precisely what made me think of you: precisely what led me to say to Culduff, 'Bramleigh is the man to carry the scheme out.'"

Now the familiarity that spoke of Culduff thus unceremoniously in great part reconciled Bramleigh to hear his own name treated in like fashion, all the more that it was in a quotation; but still he winced under the cool impertinence of the man, and grieved to think how far his own priceless wine had contributed towards it. The Colonel therefore merely bowed his acknowledgment and was silent.

"I'll be frank with you," said Cutbill, emptying the last of the decanter into his glass as he spoke. "I'll be frank with you. We've got coal; whether it be much or little, there it is. As to quality, as I

said before, it isn't Cardiff. It won't set the Thames on fire, any more than the noble lord that owns it; but coal it is, and it will burn as coal—and yield gas as coal—and make coke as coal, and who wants more? As to working it himself, Culduff might just as soon pretend he'd pay the National Debt. He is over head and ears already;—he has been in bondage with the children of Israel this many a day, and if he wasn't a peer he could not show;—but that's neither here nor there. To set the concern a-going, we must either have a loan or a company. I'm for a company."

"You are for a company," reiterated Bramleigh, slowly, as he fixed his eyes calmly but steadily on him.

"Yes, I'm for a company. With a company, Bramleigh," said he, as he tossed off the last glass of wine, "there's always more of P. E."

"Of what?"

"Of P. E.—Preliminary Expenses! There's a commission to inquire into this, and a deputation to investigate that. No men on earth dine like deputations. I never knew what dining was till I was named on a deputation. It was on sewerage. And

didn't the champagne flow! There was a viaduct to be constructed to lead into the Thames, and I never think of that viaduct without the taste of turtle in my mouth, and a genial feeling of milk-punch all over me. The assurance offices say that there was scarcely such a thing known as a gout premium in the City till the joint-stock companies came in; now they have them every day."

"Revenons à nos moutons, as the French say, Mr. Cutbill," said Bramleigh, gravely.

"If it's a pun you mean, and that we're to have another bottle of the same, I second the motion."

Bramleigh gave a sickly smile as he rang the bell; but neither the jest nor the jester much pleased him.

"Bring another bottle of 'Mouton,' Drayton, and fresh glasses," said he, as the butler appeared.

"I'll keep mine, it is warm and mellow," said Cutbill. "The only fault with that last bottle was the slight chill on it."

"You have been frank with me, Mr. Cutbill," said Bramleigh, as soon as the servant withdrew, "and I will be no less so with you. I have retired from the world of business,—I have quitted the active

sphere where I have passed some thirty odd years, and have surrendered ambition, either of money-making, or place, or rank, and come over here with one single desire, one single wish,—I want to see what's to be done for Ireland."

Cutbill lifted his glass to his lips, but scarcely in time to hide the smile of incredulous drollery which curled them, and which the other's quick glance detected.

"There is nothing to sneer at, sir, in what I said, and I will repeat my words. I want to see what's to be done for Ireland."

"It's very laudable in you, there can be no doubt," said Cutbill, gravely.

"I am well aware of the peril incurred by addressing to men like yourself, Mr. Cutbill, any opinions—any sentiments—which savour of disinterestedness or—or——"

"Poetry," suggested Cutbill.

"No, sir; patriotism was the word I sought for. And it is not by any means necessary that a man should be an Irishman to care for Ireland. I think, sir, there is nothing in that sentiment at least which will move your ridicule."

"Quite the reverse. I have drunk 'Prosperity to Ireland' at public dinners for twenty years; and in very good liquor too, occasionally."

"I am happy to address a gentleman so graciously disposed to listen to me," said Bramleigh, whose face was now crimson with anger. "There is only one thing more to be wished for,—that he would join some amount of trustfulness to his politeness; with that he would be perfect."

"Here goes then for perfection," cried Cutbill, gaily. "I'm ready from this time to believe anything you tell me."

"Sir, I will not draw largely on the fund you so generously place at my disposal. I will simply ask you to believe me a man of honour."

"Only that? No more than that?"

"No more, I pledge you my word."

"My dear Bramleigh, your return for the income-tax is enough to prove that. Nothing short of high integrity ever possessed as good a fortune as yours."

"You are speaking of my fortune, Mr. Cutbill, not of my character."

"Ain't they the same? Ain't they one and

the same? Show me your dividends, and I will show you your disposition — that's as true as the Bible."

"I will not follow you into this nice inquiry. I will simply return to where I started from, and repeat, I want to do something for Ireland."

"Do it, in God's name; and I hope you'll like it when it's done. I have known some half-dozen men in my time who had the same sort of ambition. One of them tried a cotton-mill on the Liffey, and they burned him down. Another went in for patent fuel, and they shot his steward. A third tried Galway marble, and they shot himself. But after all there's more honour where there's more danger. What, may I ask, is your little game for Ireland?"

"I begin to suspect that a better time for business, Mr. Cutbill, might be an hour after breakfast. Shall we adjourn till to-morrow morning?"

"I am completely at your orders. For my own part, I never felt clearer in my life than I do this minute. I'm ready to go into coal with you: from the time of sinking the shaft to riddling the slack, my little calculations are all made. I could address a board of managing directors here as I sit; and say,

what for dividend, what for repairs, what for a reserved fund, and what for the small robberies."

The unparalleled coolness of the man had now pushed Bramleigh's patience to its last limit; but a latent fear of what such a fellow might be in his enmity, restrained him and compelled him to be cautious.

"What sum do you think the project will require, Mr. Cutbill?"

"I think about eighty thousand; but I'd say one hundred and fifty—it's always more respectable. Small investments are seldom liked; and then the margin—the margin is broader."

"Yes, certainly; the margin is much broader."

"Fifty-pound shares, with a call of five every three months, will start us. The chief thing is to begin with a large hand." Here he made a wide sweep of his arm.

"For coal like that yonder," said Bramleigh, pointing to the specimen, "you'd not get ten shillings the ton."

"Fifteen—fifteen. I'd make it the test of a man's patriotism to use it. I'd get the Viceroy to burn it, and the Chief Secretary, and the Archbishop, and

Father Cullen. I'd heat St. Patrick's with it, and the National Schools. There could be no disguise about it; like the native whisky, it would be known by the smell of the smoke."

"You have drawn up some sort of prospectus?"

"Some sort of prospectus! I think I have. There's a document there on the table might go before the House of Commons this minute; and the short and the long of it is, Bramleigh"—here he crossed his arms on the table, and dropped his voice to a tone of great confidence—"it is a good thing—a right good thing. There's coal there, of one kind or other, for five-and-twenty years, perhaps more. The real, I may say, the only difficulty of the whole scheme will be to keep old Culduff from running off with all the profits. As soon as the money comes rolling in, he'll set off shelling it out; he's just as wasteful as he was thirty years ago."

"That will be impossible when a company is once regularly formed."

"I know that. I know that; but men of his stamp say, 'We know nothing about trade. We haven't been bred up to office-stools and big ledgers; and when we want money, we get it how we can.'"

"We can't prevent him selling out or mortgaging his shares. You mean, in short, that he should not be on the direction?" added he.

"That's it; that's exactly it," said Cutbill, joyously.

"Will he like that? Will he submit to it?"

"He'll like whatever promises to put him most speedily into funds; he'll submit to whatever threatens to stop the supplies. Don't you know these men better than I do, who pass lives of absenteeism from their country; how little they care how or whence money comes, provided they get it? They neither know, nor want to know, about good or bad seasons, whether harvests are fine, or trade profitable; their one question is, 'Can you answer my draft at thirty-one days?'"

"Ah, yes; there is too much, far too much, of what you say in the world," said Bramleigh, sighing.

"These are not the men who want to do something for Ireland," said the other, quizzically.

"Sir, it may save us both some time and temper if I tell you I have never been 'chaffed.'"

"That sounds to me like a man saying, I have

never been out in the rain; but as it is so, there's no more to be said."

"Nothing, sir. Positively nothing on that head."

"Nor indeed on any other. Men in my line of life couldn't get on without it. Chaff lubricates business just the way grease oils machinery. There would be too much friction in life without chaff, Bramleigh."

"I look upon it as directly the opposite. I regard it as I would a pebble getting amongst the wheels, and causing jar and disturbance, sir."

"Well, then," said Cutbill, emptying the last drop into his glass, "I take it I need not go over all the details you will find in those papers. There are plans, and specifications, and estimates, and computations, showing what we mean to do, and how; and as I really could add nothing to the report, I suppose I may wish you a good night."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Cutbill, if my inability to be jocular should deprive me of the pleasure of your society, but there are still many points on which I desire to be informed."

"It's all there. If you were to bray me in a

mortar you couldn't get more out of me than you'll find in those papers; and whether it's the heat of the room, or the wine, or the subject, but I am awfully sleepy," and he backed this assurance with a hearty yawn.

"Well, sir, I must submit to your dictation. I will try and master these details before I go to bed, and we'll take some favourable moment to-morrow to talk them over."

"That's said like a sensible man," said Cutbill, clapping him familiarly on the shoulder, and steadying himself the while; for as he stood up to go, he found that the wine had been stronger than he suspected. "When we see a little more of each other," said he, in the oracular tone of a man who had drunk too much; "when we see a little more of each other, we'll get on famously. You know the world, and I know the world. You have had your dealings with men, and I have had my dealings with men, and we know what's what. Ain't I right, Bramleigh?"

"I have no doubt there is much truth in what you say."

"Truth, truth, it's true as gospel! There's only

one thing, however, to be settled between us. Each must make his little concession with reci-procity—reci-procity, ain't it?"

"Quite so; but I don't see your meaning."

"Here it is then, Bramleigh; here's what I mean. If we're to march together we must start fair. No man is to have more baggage than his neighbour. If I'm to give up chaff, do you see, you must give up humbug! If I'm not to have my bit of fun, old boy, you're not to come over me about doing something for Ireland, that's all," and with this he lounged out, banging the door after him as he went.

Mr. Cutbill, as he went to his room, had a certain vague suspicion that he had drunk more wine than was strictly necessary, and that the liquor was not impossibly stronger than he had suspected. He felt, too, in the same vague way, that there had been a passage of arms between his host and himself, but as to what it was about, and who was the victor, he had not the shadow of a conception.

Neither did his ordinary remedy of pouring the contents of his water-jug over his head aid him on this occasion. "I'm not a bit sleepy; nonsense!"

muttered he, "so I'll go and see what they are doing in the smoking-room." Here he found the three young men of the house in that semi-thoughtful dreariness which is supposed to be the captivation of tobacco; as if the mass of young Englishmen needed anything to deepen the habitual gloom of their natures, or thicken the sluggish apathy that follows them into all inactivity.

"How jolly," cried Cutbill, as he entered. "I'll be shot if I believed as I came up the stairs that there was any one here. You haven't even got brandy and seltzer."

"If you touch that bell, they'll bring it," said Augustus, languidly.

"Some Moselle for *me*," said Temple, as the servant entered.

"I'm glad you've come, Cutty," cried Jack; "as old Kemp used to say, anything is better than a dead calm, even a mutiny."

"What an infernal old hurdy-gurdy. Why haven't you a decent piano here, if you have one at all?" said Cutbill, as he ran his hands over the keys of a discordant old instrument that actually shook on its legs as he struck the chords.

"I suspect it was mere accident brought it here," said Augustus. "It was invalided out of the girls' schoolroom, and sent up here to be got rid of."

"Sing us something, Cutty," said Jack; "it will be a real boon at this moment."

"I'll sing like a grove of nightingales for you, when I have wet my lips; but I am parched in the mouth, like a Cape parrot. I've had two hours of your governor below stairs. Very dry work, I promise you."

"Did he offer you nothing to drink?" asked Jack.

"Yes, we had two bottles of very tidy claret. He called it 'Mouton.'"

"By Jove!" said Augustus, "you must have been high in the governor's favour to be treated to his 'Bra Mouton.'"

"We had a round with the gloves, nevertheless," said Cutbill, "and exchanged some ugly blows. I don't exactly know about what or how it began, or even how it ended; but I know there was a black eye somewhere. He's passionate, rather."

"He has the spirit that should animate every gentleman," said Temple.

"That's exactly what *I* have. I'll stand anything, I don't care what, if it be fun. Say it's a 'joke,' and you'll never see me show bad temper; but if any fellow tries it on with me because he fancies himself a swell, or has a handle to his name, he'll soon discover his mistake. Old Culduff began that way. You'd laugh if you saw how he floundered out of the swamp afterwards."

"Tell us about it, Cutty," said Jack encouragingly.

"I beg to say I should prefer not hearing anything which might, even by inference, reflect on a person holding Lord Culduff's position in my profession," said Temple haughtily.

"Is that the quarter the wind's in?" asked Cutbill, with a not very sober expression in his face.

"Sing us a song, Cutty. It will be better than all this sparring," said Jack.

"What shall it be?" said Cutbill, seating himself at the piano, and running over the keys with no small skill. "Shall I describe my journey to Ireland?"

"By all means let's hear it," said Augustus.

"I forget how it goes. Indeed, some verses I was making on the curate's sister have driven the

others out of my head." Jack drew nigh, and leaning over his shoulder, whispered something in his ear.

"What!" cried Cutbill, starting up; "he says he'll pitch me neck and crop out of the window."

"Not unless you deserve it—add that," said Jack sternly.

"I must have an apology for those words, sir. I shall insist on your recalling them, and expressing your sincere regret for having ever used them."

"So you shall, Cutty. I completely forgot that this tower was ninety feet high; but I'll pitch you downstairs, which will do as well."

There was a terrible gleam of earnestness in Jack's eye as he spoke this laughingly, which appalled Cutbill far more than any bluster, and he stammered out, "Let us have no practical jokes; they're bad taste. You'd be a great fool, admiral"—this was a familiarity he occasionally used with Jack—"you'd be a great fool to quarrel with *me*. I can do more with the fellows at Somerset House than most men going; and when the day comes that they'll give you a command, and you'll want twelve or fifteen hundred to set you afloat, Tom Cutbill is not the worst man to know in the City. Not to say, that if things go

right down here, I could help you to something very snug in our mine. Won't we come out strong then, eh?" Here he rattled over the keys once more; and after humming to himself for a second or two, burst out with a rattling, merry air, to which he sung,—

With crests on our harness and breechin,
In a carriage and four we shall roll,
With a splendid French cook in the kitchen,
If we only succeed to find coal,
Coal!
If we only are sure to find coal.

"A barcarole, I declare," said Lord Culduff, entering. "It was a good inspiration led me up here."

A jolly roar of laughter at his mistake welcomed him; and Cutty, with an aside, cried out, "He's deaf as a post," and continued,—

If we marry, we'll marry a beauty,
If single, we'll try and control
Our tastes within limits of duty,
And make ourselves jolly with coal,
Coal!
And make ourselves jolly with coal.

They may talk of the mines of Golconda-r,
Or the shafts of Puebla del Sol;
But to fill a man's pocket I wonder,
If there's anything equal to coal,
Coal!
If there's anything equal to coal.

At Naples we'll live on the Chiaja,
With our schooner-yacht close to the Mole,
And make daily picknickings to Baja,
If we only come down upon coal,
Coal!
If we only come down upon coal.

"One of the fishermen's songs," said Lord Culduff, as he beat time on the table. "I've passed many a night on the Bay of Naples listening to them."

And a wild tumultuous laugh now convulsed the company, and Cutbill, himself overwhelmed by the absurdity, rushed to the door, and made his escape without waiting for more.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE COTTAGE.

JULIA L'ESTRANGE was busily engaged in arranging some flowers in certain vases in her little drawing-room, and, with a taste all her own, draping a small hanging lamp with creepers, when Jack Bramleigh appeared at the open window, and leaning on the sill, cried out, "Good morning."

"I came over to scold you, Julia," said he. "It was very cruel of you to desert us last evening, and we had a most dreary time of it in consequence."

"Come round and hold this chair for me, and don't talk nonsense."

"And what are all these fine preparations for? You are decking out your room as if for a village fête," said he, not moving from his place nor heeding her request.

"I fancy that young Frenchman who was here

last night," said she, saucily, "would have responded to my invitation if I had asked him to hold the chair I was standing on."

"I've no doubt of it," said he, gravely. "Frenchmen are vastly more gallant than we are."

"Do you know, Jack," said she again, "he is most amusing?"

"Very probably."

"And has such a perfect accent; that sort of purring French one only hears from a Parisian."

"I am charmed to hear it."

"It charmed me to hear it, I assure you. One does so long for the sounds that recall bright scenes and pleasant people; one has such a zest for the most commonplace things that bring back the memory of very happy days."

"What a lucky Frenchman to do all this!"

"What a lucky Irish girl to have met with him," said she gaily.

"And how did you come to know him, may I ask?"

"George had been several times over to inquire after him, and out of gratitude Count Pracontal,—I'm not sure that he is count though, but it is of no

moment,—made it a point to come here the first day he was able to drive out. Mr. Longworth drove him over in his pony carriage, and George was so pleased with them both that he asked them to tea last evening, and they dine here to-day?"

"Hence these decorations?"

"Precisely."

"What a brilliant neighbourhood we have! And there are people will tell you that this is all barbarism here."

"Come over this evening, Jack, and hear M. Pracontal sing,—he has a delicious tenor voice,—and you'll never believe in that story of barbarism again. We had quite a little *salon* last night."

"I must take your word for his attractive qualities," said Jack, as his brow contracted and his face grew darker. "I thought your brother rather stood aloof from Mr. Longworth. I was scarcely prepared to hear of his inviting him here."

"So he did; but he found him so different from what he expected,—so quiet, so well-bred, that George, who always is in a hurry to make an *amende* when he thinks he has wronged any one, actually rushed into acquaintance with him at once."

"And his sister Julia," asked Jack, with a look of impertinent irony, "was she too as impulsive in her friendship?"

"I think pretty much the same."

"It must have been a charming party."

"I flatter myself it was. They stayed till midnight; and M. Pracontal declared he'd break his other leg to-morrow if it would ensure him another such evening in his convalescence."

"Fulsome rascal! I protest it lowers my opinion of women altogether when I think these are the fellows that always meet their favour."

"Women would be very ungrateful if they did not like the people who try to please them. Now certainly, as a rule, Jack, you will admit foreigners are somewhat more eager about this than you gentlemen of England."

"I have heard about as much of this as I am likely to bear well from my distinguished stepmother," said he roughly, "so don't push my patience further."

"What do you say to our little *salon* now?" said she. "Have you ever seen ferns and variegated ivy disposed more tastefully?"

"I wish—I wish"—stammered he out, and then seemed unable to go on.

"And what do you wish?"

"I suppose I must not say it. You might feel offended besides."

"Not a bit, Jack. I am sure it never could be your intention to offend me, and a mere blunder could not do so."

"Well, I'll go round and tell you what it is I wish," and with this he entered the house and passed on into the drawing-room, and taking his place at one side of the fire, while she stood at the other, said seriously, "I was wishing, Julia, that you were less of a coquette."

"You don't mean that?" said she roguishly, dropping her long eyelashes, as she looked down immediately after.

"I mean it seriously, Julia. It is your one fault; but it is an immense one."

"My dear Jack," said she, very gravely, "you men are such churls that you are never grateful for any attempts to please you except they be limited strictly to yourselves. You would never have dared to call any little devices, by which I sought to amuse

or interest you, coquetry, so long as they were only employed on your own behalf. My real offence is that I thought the world consisted of you and some others."

"I am not your match in these sort of subtle discussions," said he, bluntly, "but I know what I say is fact."

"That I'm a coquette?" said she, with so much feigned horror that Jack could scarcely keep down the temptation to laugh.

"Just so; for the mere pleasure of displaying some grace or some attraction, you'd half kill a fellow with jealousy, or drive him clean mad with uncertainty. You insist on admiration—or what you call 'homage,' which I trust is only a French name for it, —and what's the end of it all? You get plenty of this same homage; but—but—never mind. I suppose I'm a fool to talk this way. You're laughing at me, besides, all this while. I see it—I see it in your eyes."

"I wasn't laughing, Jack, I assure you. I was simply thinking that this discovery—I mean of my coquetry—wasn't yours at all. Come, be frank and own it. Who told you I was a coquette, Jack?"

"You regard me as too dull-witted to have found it out, do you?"

"No, Jack. Too honest-hearted—too unsuspecting, too generous, to put an ill construction where a better one would do as well."

"If you mean that there are others who agree with me, you're quite right."

"And who may they be?" asked she, with a quiet smile. "Come, I have a right to know."

"I don't see the right."

"Certainly I have. It would be very ungenerous and very unjust to let me continue to exercise all those pleasing devices you have just stigmatized for the delectation of people who condemn them."

"Oh, you couldn't help that. You'd do it just to amuse yourself, as I'm sure was the case yesterday, when you put forth all your captivations for that stupid old viscount."

"Did I?"

"Did you? You have the face to ask it?"

"I have, Jack. I have courage for even more, for I will ask you, was it not Marion said this? Was it not Marion who was so severe on all my little gracefulnesses? Well, you need not answer if you

don't like. I'll not press my question; but own, it is not fair for Marion, with every advantage, her beauty, and her surroundings——"

"Her what?"

"Well, I would not use a French word; but I meant to say, those accessories which are represented by dress, and 'toilette,'—not mean things in female estimation. With all these, why not have a little mercy for the poor curate's sister, reduced to enter the lists with very uncouth weapons?"

"You won't deny that Ellen loves you?" said he, suddenly.

"I'd be sorry, very sorry, to doubt it; but she never said I was a coquette?"

"I'm sure she knows you are," said he doggedly.

"Oh, Jack, I hope this is not the way you try people on court-martial?"

"It's the fairest way ever a fellow was tried; and if one doesn't feel him guilty he'd never condemn him."

"I'd rather people would feel less, and think a little more, if I was to be 'the accused,'" said she, half pettishly.

"You got that, Master Jack; that round shot

was for *you*," said he, not without some irritation in his tone.

"Well," said she, good-humouredly, "I believe we are firing into each other this morning, and I declare I cannot see for what."

"I'll tell you, Julia. You grew very cross with me, because I accused you of being a coquette, a charge you'd have thought pretty lightly of, if you hadn't known it was deserved."

"Might there not have been another reason for the crossness, supposing it to have existed?" said she quietly.

"I cannot imagine one; at least, I can't imagine what reason you point at."

"Simply this," said she, half carelessly, "that it could have been no part of your duty to have told me so."

"You mean that it was a great liberty on my part—an unwarrantable liberty?"

"Something like it."

"That the terms which existed between us"—and now he spoke with a tremulous voice, and a look of much agitation—"could not have warranted my daring to point out a fault, even in your manner; for

I am sure, after all, your nature had nothing to do with it?"

She nodded, and was silent.

"That's pretty plain, anyhow," said he, moving towards the table, where he had placed his hat. "It's a sharp lesson to give a fellow though, all the more when he was unprepared for it."

"You forget that the first sharp lesson came from *you*."

"All true; there's no denying it." He took up his hat as she spoke, and moved, half awkwardly, towards the window. "I had a message for you from the girls, if I could only remember it. Do you happen to guess what it was about?"

She shrugged her shoulders slightly as a negative, and was silent.

"I'll be shot if I can think what it was," muttered he; "the chances are, however, it was to ask you to do something or other, and as, in your present temper, that would be hopeless, it matters little that I have forgotten it."

She made no answer to this speech, but quietly occupied herself arranging a braid of her hair that had just fallen down.

"Miss L'Estrange!" said he, in a haughty and somewhat bold tone.

"Mr. Bramleigh," replied she, turning and facing him with perfect gravity, though her tremulous lip and sparkling eye showed what the effort to seem serious cost her.

"If you will condescend to be real, to be natural, for about a minute and a half, it may save us, or at least one of us, a world of trouble and unhappiness."

"It's not a very courteous supposition of yours that implies I am unreal or unnatural," said she, calmly; "but no matter, go on; say what you desire to say, and you shall find me pretty attentive."

"What I want to say is this, then," said he, approaching where she stood, and leaning one arm on the chimney close to where her own arm was resting; "I wanted to tell—no, I wanted to ask you, if the old relations between us are to be considered as bygone?—if I am to go away from this to-day believing that all I have ever said to you, all that you heard—for you *did* hear me, Julia——"

"Julia!" repeated she, in mock amazement. "What liberty is this, sir?" and she almost laughed out as she spoke.

"I knew well how it would be," said he, angrily. "There is a heartless levity in your nature that nothing represses. I asked you to be serious for one brief instant."

"And you shall find that I can," said she, quickly. "If I have not been more so hitherto, it has been in mercy to yourself."

"In mercy to me? To me! What do you mean?"

"Simply this. You came here to give me a lesson this morning. But it was at your sister's suggestion. It was her criticism that prompted you to the task. I read it all. I saw how ill prepared you were. You have mistaken some things, forgotten others; and, in fact, you showed me that you were far more anxious I should exculpate myself than that you yourself should be the victor. It was for this reason that I was really annoyed—seriously annoyed, at what you said to me; and I called in what you are so polite as to style my 'levity' to help me through my difficulty. Now, however, you have made me serious enough; and it is in this mood I say, Don't charge yourself another time with such a mission. Reprove whatever you like,

but let it come from yourself. Don't think light-heartedness—I'll not say levity—bad in morals, because it may be bad in taste. There's a lesson for you, sir." And she held out her hand as if in reconciliation.

"But you haven't answered my question, Julia," said he, tremulously.

"And what was your question?"

"I asked you if the past—if all that had taken place between us—was to be now forgotten?"

"I declare here is George," said she, bounding towards the window and opening it. "What a splendid fish, George! Did you take it yourself?"

"Yes, and he cost me the top joint of my rod; and I'd have lost him after all if Lafferty had not waded out and landed him. I'm between two minds, Julia, whether I'll send him up to the Bramleighs'."

She put her finger to her lip to impose caution, and said, "The admiral"—the nickname by which Jack was known—"is here."

"All right," replied L'Estrange. "We'll try and keep him for dinner, and eat the fish at home." He entered as he spoke. "Where's Jack? Didn't you say he was here?"

"So he was when I spoke. He must have slipped away without my seeing it. He is really gone."

"I hear he is gazetted; appointed to some ship on a foreign station. Did he tell you of it?"

"Not a word. Indeed, he had little time, for we did nothing but squabble since he came in."

"It was Harding told me. He said that Jack did not seem overjoyed at his good luck; and declared that he was not quite sure he would accept it."

"Indeed," said she, thoughtfully.

"That's not the only news. Colonel Bramleigh was summoned to town by a telegram this morning, but what about I didn't hear. If Harding knew—and I'm not sure that he did—he was too discreet to tell. But I am not at the end of my tidings. It seems they have discovered coal on Lord Culduff's estate, and a great share company is going to be formed, and untold wealth to be distributed amongst the subscribers?"

"I wonder why Jack did not tell me he was going away?" said she.

"Perhaps he does not intend to go; perhaps the colonel has gone up to try and get something better for him; perhaps——"

"Any perhaps will do, George," said she, like one willing to change the theme. "What do you say to my decorations? Have you no compliments to make me on my exquisite taste?"

"Harding certainly thinks well of it," said he, not heeding her question.

"Thinks well of what, George?"

"He's a shrewd fellow," continued he; "and if he deems the investment good enough to venture his own money in, I suspect, Ju, we might risk ours."

"I wish you would tell me what you are talking about; for all this is a perfect riddle to me."

"It's about vesting your two thousand pounds, Julia, which now return about seventy pounds a year, in the coal speculation. That's what I am thinking of. Harding says, that taking a very low estimate of the success, there ought to be a profit on the shares of fifteen per cent. In fact, he said he wouldn't go into it himself for less."

"Why, George, why did he say this? Is there anything wrong or immoral about coal?"

"Try and be serious for one moment, Ju," said he, with a slight touch of irritation in his voice.

"What Harding evidently meant was, that a speculative enterprise was not to be deemed good if it yielded less. These shrewd men, I believe, never lay out their money without large profit."

"And, my dear George, why come and consult me about these things? Can you imagine more hopeless ignorance than mine must be on all such questions?"

"You can understand that a sum of money yielding three hundred a year is more profitably employed than when it only returned seventy."

"Yes; I think my intelligence can rise to that height."

"And you can estimate, also, what increase of comfort we should have if our present income were to be more than doubled,—which it would be in this way?"

"I'd deem it positive affluence, George."

"That's all I want you to comprehend. The next question is to get Vickars to consent; he is the surviving trustee, and you'll have to write to him, Ju. It will come better from you than me, and say —what you can say with a safe conscience—that we are miserably poor, and that, though we pinch and

save in every way we can, there's no reaching the end of the year without a deficit in the budget."

"I used that unlucky phrase once before, George, and he replied, 'Why don't you cut down the estimates?'"

"I know he did. The old curmudgeon meant I should sell Nora, and he has a son, a gentleman commoner at Cambridge, that spends more in wine-parties than our whole income."

"But it's his own, George. It is not our money he is wasting."

"Of course it is not; but does that exempt him from all comment? Not that it matters to us, however," added he, in a lighter tone. "Sit down, and try what you can do with the old fellow. You used to be a great pet of his once on a time."

"Yes, he went so far as to say that if I had even twenty thousand pounds, he didn't know a girl he'd rather have for a daughter-in-law."

"He didn't tell you that, Ju?" said L'Estrange, growing almost purple with shame and rage together.

"I pledge you my word he said it."

"And what did you say? What did you do?"

"I wiped my eyes with my handkerchief, and

told him it was for the first time in my life I felt the misery of being poor.''

"And I wager that you burst out laughing."

"I did, George. I laughed till my sides ached. I laughed till he rushed out of the room in a fit of passion, and I declare, I don't think he ever spoke ten words to me after."

"This gives me scant hope of your chance of success with him."

"I don't know, George. All this happpened ten months ago, when he came down here for the snipe-shooting. He may have forgiven, or, better still, forgotten it. In any case, tell me exactly what I'm to write, and I'll see what I can do with him."

"You're to say that your brother has just heard from a person, in whom he places the most perfect confidence, say Harding, in short—Colonel Bramleigh's agent—that an enterprise which will shortly be opened here offers an admirable opportunity of investment, and that as your small fortune in Consols——"

"In what?"

"No matter. Say that as your two thousand pounds,—which now yield an interest of seventy,

could secure you an income fully four times that sum, you hope he will give his consent to withdraw the money from the Funds, and employ it in this speculation. I'd not say speculation, I'd call it mine at once—coal-mine."

"But if I own this money, why must I ask Mr. Vickars' leave to make use of it as I please?"

"He is your trustee, and the law gives him this power, Ju, till you are nineteen, which you will not be till May next."

"He'll scarcely be disagreeable, when his opposition must end in five months."

"That's what I think too, but before that five months run over the share list may be filled, and these debentures be probably double the present price."

"I'm not sure I understand your reasoning, but I'll go and write my letter, and you shall see if I have said all that you wished."

CHAPTER XIV.

OFFICIAL CONFIDENCES.

Lord Culduff accompanied Colonel Bramleigh to town. He wanted a renewal of his leave, and deemed it better to see the head of the department in person than to address a formal demand to the office. Colonel Bramleigh, too, thought that his lordship's presence might be useful when the day of action had arrived respecting the share company—a Lord in the City having as palpable a value as the most favourable news that ever sent up the Funds.

When they reached London they separated, Bramleigh taking up his quarters in the Burlington, while Lord Culduff—on pretence of running down to some noble duke's villa near Richmond — snugly installed himself in a very modest lodging off St. James's Street, where a former valet acted as his cook and landlord, and on days of dining out assisted

at the wonderful toilet, whose success was alike the marvel and the envy of Culduff's contemporaries.

Though a man of several clubs, his lordship's favourite haunt was a small unimposing-looking house close to St. James's Square, called the "Plenipo." Its members were all diplomatists, nothing below the head of a mission being eligible for ballot. A masonic mystery pervaded all the doings of that austere temple, whose dinners were reported to be exquisite, and whose cellar had such a fame that "Plenipo Lafite" had a European reputation.

Now, veteran asylums have many things recommendatory about them, but from Greenwich and the Invalides downwards there is one especial vice that clings to them—they are haunts of everlasting complaint. The men who frequent them all belong to the past, their sympathies, their associations, their triumphs and successes, all pertain to the bygone. Harping eternally over the frivolity, the emptiness, and sometimes the vulgarity of the present, they urge each other on to most exaggerated notions of the time when they were young, and a deprecatory estimate of the world then around them.

It is not alone that the days of good dinners and good conversation have passed away, but even good manners have gone, and, more strangely too, good looks. "I protest you don't see such women now" —one of these bewigged and rouged old debauchees would say, as he gazed at the slow procession moving on to a drawing-room, and his compeers would concur with him, and wonderingly declare that the thing was inexplicable.

In the sombre-looking breakfast-room of this austere temple, Lord Culduff sat reading *The Times*. A mild soft rain was falling without; the water dripping tepid and dirty through the heavy canopy of a London fog; and a large coal fire blazed within,— that fierce furnace which seems so congenial tc English taste; not impossibly because it recalls the factory and the smelting-house—the "sacred fire" that seems to inspire patriotism by the suggestion of industry.

Two or three others sat at tables through the room, all so wonderfully alike in dress, feature, and general appearance, that they almost seemed reproductions of the same figure by a series of mirrors; but they were priests of the same "caste," whose

forms of thought and expression were precisely the same,—and thus as they dropped their scant remarks on the topics of the day, there was not an observation or a phrase of one that might not have fallen from any of the others.

"So," cried one, "they're going to send the Grand Cross to the Duke of Hochmaringen. That will be a special mission. I wonder who'll get it?"

"Cloudesley, I'd say," observed another; "he's always on the watch for anything that comes into the 'extraordinaries.'"

"It will not be Cloudesley," said a third. "He stayed away a year and eight months when they sent him to Tripoli, and there was a rare jaw about it for the estimates."

"Hochmaringen is near Baden, and not a bad place for the summer," said Culduff. "The duchess, I think, was daughter of the Margravine."

"Niece, not daughter," said a stern-looking man, who never turned his eyes from his newspaper.

"Niece or daughter, it matters little which," said Culduff, irritated at correction on such a point.

"I protest I'd rather take a turn in South Africa," cried another, "than accept one of those missions to Central Germany."

"You're right, Upton," said a voice from the end of the room, "the cookery is insufferable."

"And the hours. You retire to bed at ten."

"And the ceremonial. Blounte never threw off the lumbago he got from bowing at the court of Bratensdorf."

"They're ignoble sort of things, at the best, and should never be imposed on diplomatic men. These investitures should always be entrusted to court functionaries," said Culduff, haughtily. "If I were at the head of F. O. I'd refuse to charge one of the 'line' with such a mission."

And now something that almost verged on an animated discussion ensued as to what was and what was not the real province of diplomacy; a majority inclining to the opinion that it was derogatory to the high dignity of the calling to meddle with what, at best, was the function of the mere courtier.

"Is that Culduff driving away in that cab?" cried one, as he stood at the window.

"He has carried away my hat, I see, by mistake,"

said another. "What is he up to at this hour of the morning?"

"I think I can guess," said the grim individual who had corrected him in the matter of genealogy; "he's off to F. O., to ask for the special mission he has just declared that none of us should stoop to accept."

"You've hit it, Grindesley," cried another. "I'll wager a pony you're right."

"It's so like him."

"After all, it's the sort of thing he's best up to. La Ferronaye told me he was the best master of the ceremonies in Europe."

"Why come amongst us at all, then? Why not get himself made a gold-stick, and follow the instincts of his genius?"

"Well, I believe he wants it badly," said one who affected a tone of half kindliness. "They tell me he has not eight hundred a year left him."

"Not four. I doubt if he could lay claim to three."

"He never had in his best day above four or five thousand, though he tells you of his twenty-seven or twenty-eight."

"He had originally about six; but he always lived at the rate of twelve or fifteen, and in mere ostentation too."

"So I've always heard." And then there followed a number of little anecdotes of Culduff's selfishness, his avarice, his meanness, and such like, told with such exactitude as to show that every act of these men's lives was scrupulously watched, and when occasion offered mercilessly recorded.

While they thus sat in judgment over him, Lord Culduff himself was seated at a fire in a dingy old room in Downing Street, the Chief Secretary for Foreign Affairs opposite him. They were talking in a tone of easy familiarity, as men might who occupied the same social station, a certain air of superiority, however, being always apparent in the manner of the minister towards the subordinate.

"I don't think you can ask for this, Culduff," said the great man, as he puffed his cigar tranquilly in front of him. "You've had three of these special missions already."

"And for the simple reason that I was the one man in England who knew how to do them."

"We don't dispute the way you did them; we

only say all the prizes in the wheel should not fall to the same man."

"You have had my proxy for the last five years."

"And we have acknowledged the support—acknowledged it by more than professions."

"I can only say this, that if I had been with the other side, I'd have met somewhat different treatment."

"Don't believe it, Culduff. Every party that is in power inherits its share of obligations. We have never disowned those we owe to you."

"And why am I refused this, then?"

"If you wanted other reasons than those I have given you, I might be able to adduce them—not willingly indeed—but under pressure, and especially in strict confidence."

"Reasons against my having the mission?"

"Reasons against your having the mission."

"You amaze me, my lord. I almost doubt that I have heard you aright. I must, however, insist on your explaining yourself. Am I to understand that there are personal grounds of unfitness?"

The other bowed in assent.

"Have the kindness to let me know them."

"First of all, Culduff, this is to be a family mission—the duchess is a connection of our own royal house—and a certain degree of display and consequent expense will be required. Your fortune does not admit of this."

"Push on to the more cogent reason, my lord," said Culduff, stiffly.

"Here, then, is the more cogent reason. The court has not forgotten—what possibly the world may have forgotten—some of those passages in your life for which you, perhaps, have no other remorse than that they are not likely to recur; and as you have given no hostages for good behaviour, in the shape of a wife, the court, I say, is sure to veto your appointment. You see it all as clearly as I do."

"So far as I do see," said Culduff, slowly; "the first objection is my want of fortune, the second, my want of a wife?"

"Exactly so."

"Well, my lord, I am able to meet each of these obstacles; my agent has just discovered coal on one of my Irish estates, and I am now in town to make

only say all the prizes in the wheel should not fall to the same man."

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"So far as I do see," said Culduff, slowly; "the first objection is my want of fortune, the second, my want of a wife?"

"Exactly so."

"Well, my lord, I am able to meet each of these obstacles; my agent has just discovered coal on one of my Irish estates, and I am now in town to make

arrangements on a large scale to develope the source of wealth. As to the second disability, I shall pledge myself to present the Viscountess Culduff at the next drawing-room."

"Married already?"

"No, but I may be within a few weeks. In fact, I mean to place myself in such a position, that no one holding your office can pass me over by a pretext, or affect to ignore my claim by affirming that I labour under a disability."

"This sounds like menace, does it not?" said the other as he threw his cigar impatiently from him.

"A mere protocol, my lord, to denote intention."

"Well, I'll submit your name. I'll go further,—I'll support it. Don't leave town for a day or two. Call on Beadlesworth and see Repsley; tell him what you've said to me. If you could promise it was one of his old maiden sisters that you thought of making Lady Culduff, the thing could be clenched at once,—but I take it, you have other views?"

"I have other views," said he gravely.

"I'm not indiscreet, and I shall not ask you more

on that head. By the way, isn't your leave up, or nearly up?"

"It expired on Wednesday last, and I want it renewed for two months."

"Of course, if we send you on this mission, you'll not want the leave? I had something else to say. What was it?"

"I have not the very vaguest idea."

"Oh! I remember. It was to recommend you not to take your wife from the stage. There's a strong prejudice in a certain quarter as to that,—in fact, I may say it couldn't be got over."

"I may relieve you of any apprehensions on that score. Indeed, I don't know what fact in my life should expose me to the mere suspicion."

"Nothing, — nothing, — except that impulsive generosity of your disposition, which might lead you to do what other men would stop short to count the cost of."

"It would never lead me to derogate, my lord," said he proudly as he took his hat, and bowing haughtily left the room.

"The greatest ass in the whole career, and the word is a bold one," said the Minister as the door

closed. "Meanwhile, I must send in his name for this mission, which he is fully equal to. What a happy arrangement it is, that in an age when our flunkies aspire to be gentlemen, there are gentlemen who ask nothing better than to be flunkies!"

CHAPTER XV.

WITH HIS LAWYER.

THOUGH Colonel Bramleigh's visit to town was supposed to be in furtherance of that speculation by which Lord Culduff calculated on wealth and splendour, he had really another object, and while Culduff imagined him to be busy in the City, and deep in shares and stock lists, he was closely closeted with his lawyer, and earnestly poring over a mass of time-worn letters and documents, carefully noting down dates, docketing, and annotating, in a way that showed what importance he attached to the task before him.

"I tell you what, Sedley," said he, as he threw his pen disdainfully from him, and lay back in his chair, "the whole of this move is a party dodge. It is part and parcel of that vile persecution with which the Tory faction pursued me during my late canvass.

You remember their vulgar allusions to my father the brewer, and their coarse jest about my frothy oratory? This attack is but the second act of the same drama."

"I don't think so," mildly rejoined the other party. "Conflicts are sharp enough while the struggle lasts; but they rarely carry their bitterness beyond the day of battle."

"That is an agent's view of the matter," said Bramleigh, with asperity. "The agent always persists in believing the whole thing a sham fight; but though men do talk a great deal of rot and humbug about their principles on the hustings, their personal feelings are just as real, just as acute, and occasionally just as painful, as on any occasion in their lives; and I repeat to you, the trumped-up claim of this foreigner is neither more nor less than a piece of party malignity."

"I cannot agree with you. The correspondence we have just been looking at shows how upwards of forty years ago the same pretensions were put forward, and a man calling himself Montagu Lami Bramleigh declared he was the rightful heir to your estates."

"A rightful heir whose claims could be always

compromised by a ten-pound note was scarcely very dangerous."

"Why make any compromise at all if the fellow was clearly an impostor?"

"For the very reason that you yourself now counsel a similar course: to avoid the scandal of a public trial. To escape all those insolent comments which a party press is certain to pass on a political opponent."

"That could scarcely have been apprehended from the Bramleigh I speak of, who was clearly poor, illiterate, and friendless; whereas the present man has, from some source or other, funds to engage eminent counsel and retain one of the first men at the bar."

"I protest, Sedley, you puzzle me," said Bramleigh, with an angry sparkle in his eye. "A few moments back you treated all this pretension as a mere pretext for extorting money, and now you talk of this fellow and his claim, as subjects that may one day be matter for the decision of a jury. Can you reconcile two views so diametrically opposite?"

"I think I can. It is at law as in war. The feint may be carried on to a real attack whenever the

position assailed be possessed of an over-confidence or but ill defended. It might be easy enough, perhaps, to deal with this man. Let him have some small success, however; let him gain a verdict, for instance, in one of those petty suits for ejectment, and his case at once becomes formidable."

"All this," said Bramleigh, "proceeds on the assumption that there is something in the fellow's claim?"

"Unquestionably."

"I declare," said Bramleigh, rising and pacing the room, "I have not temper for this discussion. My mind has not been disciplined to that degree of refinement that I can accept a downright swindle as a demand founded on justice."

"Let us prove it a swindle, and there is an end of it."

"And will you tell me, sir," said he passionately, "that every gentleman holds his estates on the condition that the title may be contested by any impostor who can dupe people into advancing money to set the law in motion?"

"When such proceedings are fraudulent a very heavy punishment awaits them."

"And what punishment of the knave equals the penalty inflicted on the honest man in exposure, shame, insolent remarks, and worse than even these, a contemptuous pity for that reverse of fortune which newspaper writers always announce as an inevitable consummation?"

"These are all hard things to bear, but I don't suspect they ever deterred any man from holding an estate."

The half jocular tone of his remark rather jarred on Bramleigh's sensibilities, and he continued to walk the room in silence; at last, stopping short, he wheeled round and said,—

"Do you adhere to your former opinion? would you try a compromise?"

"I would. The man has a case quite good enough to interest a speculative lawyer, — good enough to go before a jury,—good enough for everything, but success. One half what the defence would cost you will probably satisfy his expectations, not to speak of all you will spare yourself in unpleasantness and exposure."

"It is a hard thing to stoop to," said Bramleigh, painfully.

"It need not be, at least not to the extent you imagine; and when you throw your eye over your lawyer's bill of costs, the phrase 'incidental expenses' will spare your feelings any more distinct reference to this transaction."

"A most considerate attention. And now for the practical part. Who is this man's lawyer?"

"A most respectable practitioner, Kelson, of Temple Court. A personal friend of my own."

"And what terms would you propose?"

"I'd offer five thousand, and be prepared to go to eight, possibly to ten."

"To silence a mere menace."

"Exactly. It's a mere menace to-day, but six months hence it may be something more formidable. It is a curious case, cleverly contrived and ingeniously put together. I don't say that we couldn't smash it; such carpentry always has a chink or an open somewhere. Meanwhile the scandal is spreading over not only England, but over the world, and no matter how favourable the ultimate issue, there will always remain in men's minds the recollection that the right to your estate was contested and that you had to defend your possession.

"I had always thought till now," said Bramleigh, slowly, "that the legal mind attached very little importance to the flying scandals that amuse society. You appear to accord them weight and influence."

"I am not less a man of the world because I am a lawyer, Colonel Bramleigh," said the other, half tartly.

"If this must be done, the sooner it be over the better. A man of high station—a peer—is at this moment paying such attention to one of my daughters that I may expect at any moment, to-day perhaps, to receive a formal proposal for her hand. I do not suspect that the threat of an unknown claimant to my property would disturb his lordship's faith in my security or my station, but the sensitive dislike of men of his class to all publicity that does not redound to honour or distinction,—the repugnance to whatever draws attention to them for aught but court favour or advancement,—might well be supposed to have its influence with him, and I think it would be better to spare him,—to spare us, too,—this exposure."

"I'll attend to it immediately. Kelson hinted to me that the claimant was now in England."

"I was not aware of that."

"Yes, he is over here now, and I gather, too, has contrived to interest some people in his pretensions."

"Does he affect the station of a gentleman?"

"Thoroughly; he is, I am told, well-mannered, prepossessing in appearance, and presentable in every respect."

"Let us ask him over to Castello, Sedley," said Bramleigh, laughing.

"I've known of worse strategy," said the lawyer, dryly.

"What! are you actually serious?"

"I say that such a move might not be the worst step to an amicable settlement. In admitting the assailant to see all the worth and value of the fortress, it would also show him the resources for defence, and he might readily compute what poor chances were his against such odds."

"Still, I doubt if I could bring myself to consent to it. There is a positive indignity in making any concession to such a palpable imposture."

"Not palpable till proven. The most unlikely cases have now and then pushed some of our ablest men to upset. Attack can always choose its own

time, its own ground, and is master of almost every condition of the combat."

"I declare, Sedley, if this man had retained your services to make a good bargain for him, he could scarcely have selected a more able agent."

"You could not more highly compliment the zeal I am exercising in your service."

"Well, I take it I must leave the whole thing in your hands. I shall not prolong my stay in town. I wanted to do something in the City, but I find these late crashes in the banks have spread such terror and apprehension, that nobody will advance a guinea on anything. There is an admirable opening just now,—coal."

"In Egypt?"

"No, in Ireland."

"Ah, in Ireland? That's very different. You surely cannot expect capital will take *that* channel?"

"You are an admirable lawyer, Sedley. I am told London has not your equal as a special pleader, but let me tell you you are not either a projector or a politician. I am both, and I declare to you that this country which you deride and distrust is the California of Great Britain. Write to me at your earliest;

finish this business, if you can, out of hand, and if you make good terms for me I'll send you some shares in an enterprise—an Irish enterprise—which will pay you a better dividend than some of your East county railroads."

"Have you changed the name of your place? Your son, Mr. John Bramleigh, writes 'Bishop's Folly' at the top of his letter."

"It is called Castello, sir. I am not responsible for the silly caprices of a sailor."

CHAPTER XVI.

SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

Lord Culduff and Colonel Bramleigh spoke little to each other as they journeyed back to Ireland. Each fell back upon the theme personally interesting to him, and cared not to impart it to his neighbour. They were not like men who had so long travelled the same road in life that by a dropping word, a whole train of associations can be conjured up, and familiar scenes and people be passed in review before the mind.

A few curt sentences uttered by Bramleigh told how matters stood in the City—money was "tight" being the text of all he said; but of that financial sensitiveness that shrinks timidly from all enterprise after a period of crash and bankruptcy Culduff could make nothing. In his own craft nobody dreaded the fire because his neighbour's child was burned,

and he could not see why capitalists should not learn something from diplomacy.

Nor was Colonel Bramleigh, on his side, much better able to follow the subjects which had interest for his companion. The rise and fall of kingdoms, the varying fortunes of States, impressed themselves upon the City man by the condition of financial credit they implied, and a mere glance at the price of a foreign loan conveyed to his appreciation a more correct notion of a people than all the Blue Books and all the correspondence with plenipotentiaries.

These were not Culduff's views. His code—it is the code of all his calling—was: No country of any pretensions, no more than any gentleman of blood and family, ever became bankrupt. Pressed, hard-pushed, he would say. Yes! we all of us have had our difficulties, and to surmount them occasionally we are driven to make unprofitable bargains, but we "rub through," and so will Greece and Spain and those other countries where they are borrowing at twelve or twenty per cent., and raise a loan each year to discharge the dividends.

Not only, then, were these two men little gifted with qualities to render them companionable to each

other, but from the totally different way every event and every circumstance presented itself to their minds, each grew to conceive for the other a sort of depreciatory estimate as of one who only could see a very small part of any subject, and even that coloured and tinted by the hues of his own daily calling.

"So, then," said Culduff, after listening to a somewhat lengthy explanation from Bramleigh of why and how it was that there was nothing to be done financially at the moment, "so, then, I am to gather the plan of a company to work the mines is out of the question?"

"I would rather call it deferred than abandoned," was the cautious reply.

"In my career what we postpone we generally prohibit. And what other course is open to us?"

"We can wait, my lord, we can wait. Coal is not like indigo or tobacco; it is not a question of hours—whether the crop be saved or ruined. We can wait."

"Very true, sir; but *I* cannot wait. There are some urgent calls upon me just now, the men who are pressing which will not be so complaisant as to wait either."

"I was always under the impression, my lord, that your position as a peer, and the nature of the services that you were engaged in, were sufficient to relieve you from all the embarrassment that attach to humbler men in difficulties?"

"They don't arrest, but they dun us, sir; and they dun with an insistance and an amount of menace, too, that middle-class people can form no conception of. They besiege the departments we serve under with their vulgar complaints, and if the rumour gets abroad that one of us is about to be advanced to a governorship or an embassy, they assemble in Downing Street like a Reform demonstration. I declare to you I had to make my way through a lane of creditors from the Privy Council Office to the private entrance to F. O., my hands full of their confounded accounts,—one fellow, a bootmaker, actually having pinned his bill to the skirt of my coat as I went. And the worst of these impertinences is that they give a Minister who is indisposed towards you a handle for refusing your just claims. I have just come through such an ordeal: I have been told that my debts are to be a bar to my promotion."

The almost tremulous horror which he gave to this last expression—as of an outrage unknown to mankind—warned Bramleigh to be silent.

"I perceive that you do not find it easy to believe this, but I pledge my word to you it is true. It is not forty-eight hours since a Secretary of State assumed to make my personal liabilities—the things which, if any things are a man's own, are certainly so—to make these an objection to my taking a mission of importance. I believe he was sorry for his indiscretion; I have reason to suppose that it was a blunder he will not readily repeat."

"And you obtained your appointment?" asked Bramleigh.

"Minister extraordinary and plenipotentiary to the court of Hochmaringen," said Culduff, with a slow and pompous enunciation.

Bramleigh, pardonably ignorant of the geography of the important State alluded to, merely bowed in acknowledgment. "Is there much—much to do at one of these courts?" asked he diffidently, after a pause.

"In one sense there is a great deal. In Germany the action of the greater cabinets is always to be

discovered in the intrigues of the small dukedoms, just as you gather the temper of the huntsman from the way he lashes the hounds. You may, therefore, send a 'crétin,' if you like, to Berlin or Vienna; you want a man of tact and address at Sigmaringen or Klein-Esel-Stadt. They begin to see that here at home, but it took them years to arrive at it."

Whether Bramleigh was confounded by the depth of this remark, or annoyed by the man who made it, he relapsed into a dreamy silence that soon passed into sleep, into which state the illustrious diplomatist followed, and thus was the journey made till the tall towers of Castello came into view, and they found themselves rapidly careering along with four posters towards the grand entrance. The tidings of their coming soon reached the drawing-room, and the hall was filled by the young members of the family to welcome them. "Remember," said Bramleigh, "we have had nothing but a light luncheon since morning. Come and join us, if you like, in the dining-room, but let us have some dinner as soon as may be."

It is not pleasant, perhaps, to be talked to while eating by persons quite unemployed by the pleasures

of the table; but there is a sort of "free and easy" at such times not wholly unconducive to agreeable intercourse, and many little cares and attentions, impossible or unmeaning in the more formal habits of the table, are now graceful adjuncts to the incident. Thus was it that Marion contrived by some slight service or other to indicate to Lord Culduff that he was an honoured guest; and when she filled his glass with champagne, and poured a little into her own to pledge him, the great man felt a sense of triumph that warmed the whole of that region where, anatomically, his heart was situated. While the others around were engaged in general conversation, she led him to talk of his journey to town, and what he had done there; and he told her somewhat proudly of the high mission about to be intrusted to him, not omitting to speak of the haughty tone he had used towards the Minister and the spirit he had evinced in asserting his just claims. "We had what threatened at one time to be a stormy interview. When a man like myself has to recall the list of his services, the case may well be considered imminent. He pushed me to this, and I accepted his challenge.

I told him, if I am not rich, it is because I have spent my fortune in maintaining the dignity of the high stations I have filled. The breaches in my fortune are all honourable wounds. He next objected to what I could not but admit as a more valid barrier to my claims. Can you guess it?"

She shook her head in dissent. It could not be his rank, or anything that bore upon his rank. Was it possible that official prudery had been shocked by the noble lord's social derelictions? Had the scandal of that old elopement survived to tarnish his fame and injure his success? and she blushed as she thought of the theme to which he invited her approach.

"I see you do divine it," said he, smiling courteously.

"I suspect not," said she diffidently, and still blushing deeper.

"It would be a great boon to me,—a most encouraging assurance," said he in a low and earnest voice, "if I could believe that your interest in me went so far as actually to read the story and anticipate the catastrophe of my life. Tell me then, I entreat you, that you know what I allude to."

She hesitated. "Was it possible," thought she, "that he wished me to admit that my opinion of him was not prejudiced by this 'escapade' of thirty years ago? Is he asking me to own that I am tolerant towards such offences?" His age, his tone generally, his essentially foreign breeding, made this very possible. Her perplexity was great, and her confusion increased with every minute.

At this critical moment there was a general move to go into the drawing-room, and as he gave her his arm, Lord Culduff drew her gently towards him, and said in his most insinuating voice, "Let me hear my fate."

"I declare, my lord," said she hesitatingly, "I don't know what to say. Moralists and worldly people have two different measures for these things. I have no pretensions to claim a place with the former, and I rather shrink from accepting all the ideas of the latter. At all events, I would suppose that after a certain lapse of time, when years have gone over,—profitably,—I would hope,—in fact, I mean,—in short I do not know what I mean."

"You mean, perhaps, that it is not at my time of life men take such a step with prudence. Is

that it?" asked he, trying in vain to keep down the irritation that moved him.

"Well, my lord, I believe about the prudence there can scarcely be two opinions, whether a man be young or old. These things are wrong in themselves, and nothing can make them right."

"I protest I am unable to follow you," said he, tartly.

"All the better, my lord, if I be only leading you where you have no inclination to wander. I see Nelly wants me at the piano."

"And you prefer accompanying *her* to *me?*" said he reproachfully.

"At least, my lord, we shall be in harmony, which is scarcely our case here."

He sighed, almost theatrically, as he relinquished her arm, and retiring to a remote part of the room, affected to read a newspaper. Mr. Cutbill, however, soon drew a chair near, and engaged him in conversation.

"So Bramleigh has done nothing," whispered Cutbill, as he bent forward. "He did not, so far as I gather, even speak of the mine in the City."

"He said it was of no use; the time was unfavourable."

"Did you ever know it otherwise? Isn't it with that same cant of an unfavourable time, these men always add so much to the premium on every undertaking?"

"Sir, I am unable to answer your question. It is my first—I would I might be able to say, and my last—occasion to deal with this class of people."

"They're not a bad set, after all; only you must take them in the way they're used to—the way they understand."

"It is a language I have yet to learn, Mr. Cutbill."

"The sooner your lordship sets to work at it the better then."

Lord Culduff wheeled round in his chair, and stared with amazement at the man before him. He saw, however, the unmistakable signs of his having drunk freely, and his bloodshot eyes declared that the moment was not favourable for calm discussion.

"It would be as well, perhaps, to adjourn this conversation," said Culduff.

"I'm for business—anywhere and at any moment. I made one of the best hits I ever chanced upon after a smash on the Trent Valley line. There

was Boulders, of the firm of Skale and Boulders Brothers, — had his shoulder dislocated and two of his front teeth knocked out. He was lying with a lot of scantling and barrel-staves over him, and he cried out, 'Is there any one there?' I said, 'Yes; Cutbill. Tom Cutbill, of Viceregal-terrace, St. John's Wood.'"

Lord Culduff's patience could stand no more, and he arose with a slight bow and moved haughtily away. Cutbill, however, was quickly at his side. "You must hear the rest of this; it was a matter of close on ten thousand pounds to me, and this is the way it came out——"

"I felicitate you heartily, sir, on your success, but beg I may be spared the story of it."

"You've heard worse. Egad, I'd not say you haven't told worse. It's not every fellow, I promise you, has his wits about him at a moment when people are shouting for help, and an express train standing on its head in a cutting, and a tender hanging over a viaduct."

"Sir, there are worse inflictions than even this."

"Eh, what?" said Cutbill, crossing his arms on

his chest, and looking fully in the other's face; but Lord Culduff moved quietly on, and approaching a table where Ellen was seated, said, "I'm coming to beg for a cup of tea;" not a trace of excitement or irritation to be detected in his voice or manner. He loitered for a few moments at the table, talking lightly and pleasantly on in different subjects, and then moved carelessly away till he found himself near the door, when he made a precipitate escape and hurried up to his room.

It was his invariable custom to look at himself carefully in the glass whenever he came home at night. As a general might have examined the list of killed and wounded after an action, computing with himself the cost of victory or defeat, so did this veteran warrior of a world's campaign go carefully over all the signs of wear and tear, the hard lines of pain or chequered colouring of agitation, which his last engagement might have inflicted.

As he sat down before his mirror now, he was actually shocked to see what ravages a single evening had produced. The circles around his eyes were deeply indented, the corners of his mouth drawn down so fixedly and firmly that all his

attempts to conjure up a smile were failures, while a purple tint beneath his rouge totally destroyed that delicate colouring which was wont to impart the youthful look to his features.

The vulgar impertinence of Cutbill made indeed but little impression upon him. An annoyance while it lasted, it still left nothing for memory that could not be dismissed with ease. It was Marion. It was what she had said that weighed so painfully on his heart, wounding where he was most intensely and delicately sensitive. She had told him—what had she told him? He tried to recall her exact words, but he could not. They were in reply to remarks of his own, and owed all their significance to the context. One thing she certainly had said,—that there were certain steps in life about which the world held but one opinion, and the allusion was to men marrying late in life; and then she added a remark as to the want of "sympathy"—or was it "harmony" she called it?—between them. How strange that he could not remember more exactly all that passed, he who, after his interviews with Ministers and great men, could go home and send off in an official despatch the whole dialogue of the audience.

But why seek for the precise expressions she employed? The meaning should surely be enough for him, and that was—there was no denying it—that the disparity of their ages was a bar to his pretensions. "Had our ranks in life been alike, there might have been force in her observation; but she forgets that a coronet encircles a brow like a wreath of youth;" and he adjusted the curls of his wig as he spoke, and smiled at himself more successfully than he had done before.

"On the whole, perhaps it is better," said he, as he arose and walked the room. "A mésalliance can only be justified by great beauty or great wealth. One must do a consumedly rash thing, or a wonderfully sharp one, to come out well with the world. Forty thousand, and a good-looking girl—she isn't more,—would not satisfy the just expectations of society, which, with men like myself, are severely exacting."

He had met a repulse, he could not deny it, and the sense of pain it inflicted galled him to the quick. To be sure, the thing occurred in a remote, out-of-the-way spot, where there were no people to discove or retail the story. It was not as if it chanced in

some cognate land of society, where such incidents get immediate currency and form the gossip of every coterie. Who was ever to hear of what passed in an Irish country-house? Marion herself indeed might write it,—she most probably would—but to whom? To some friend as little in the world as herself, and none knew better than Lord Culduff of how few people the "world" was composed. It was a defeat, but a defeat that need never be gazetted. And after all, are not the worst things in all our reverses, the comments that are passed upon them? Are not the censures of our enemies and the condolences of our friends sometimes harder to bear than the misfortunes that have evoked them?

What Marion's manner towards him might be in future, was also a painful reflection. It would naturally be a triumphant incident in her life to have rejected such an offer. Would she be eager to parade this fact before the world? Would she try to let people know that she had refused him? This was possible. He felt that such a slight would tarnish the whole glory of his life, whose boast was to have done many things that were actually wicked, but not one that was merely weak.

The imminent matter was to get out of his present situation without defeat. To quit the field, but not as a beaten army; and revolving how this was to be done he sunk off to sleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT CASTELLO.

A PRIVATE letter from a friend had told Jack Bramleigh that his father's opposition to the Government had considerably damaged his chance of being employed, but that he possibly might get a small command on the African station. With what joy then did he receive the "official," marked on H.M.'s service, informing him that he was appointed to the *Sneezer* despatch gunboat, to serve in the Mediterranean, and enjoining him to repair to town without unnecessary delay, to receive further orders.

He had forborne, as we have seen, to tell Julia his former tidings. They were not indeed of a nature to rejoice over, but here was great news. He only wanted two more years to be qualified for his "Post," and once a captain, he would have a position which might warrant his asking Julia to

be his wife, and thus was it that the great dream of his whole existence was interwoven into his career, and his advancement as a sailor linked with his hopes as a lover; and surely it is well for us that ambitions in life appeal to us in other and humbler ways than by the sense of triumph, and that there are better rewards for success than either the favour of princes or the insignia of rank.

To poor Jack, looking beyond that two years, it was not a three-decker, nor even frigate, it was the paradise of a cottage overgrown with sweetbriar and honeysuckle, that presented itself, — and a certain graceful figure, gauzy and floating, sitting in the porch, while he lay at her feet, lulled by the drowsy ripple of the little trout-stream that ran close by. So possessed was he by this vision, so entirely and wholly did it engross him, that it was with difficulty he gave coherent replies to the questions poured in upon him at the breakfast-table, as to the sort of service he was about to be engaged in, and whether it was as good or a better thing than he had been expecting.

"I wish you joy, Jack," said Augustus. "You're a lucky dog to get afloat again so

soon. You haven't been full six months on half-pay."

"I wish you joy too," said Temple, "and am thankful to Fate it is you, and not I, have to take the command of H.M.'s gunboat *Sneezer*."

"Perhaps, all things considered, it is as well as it is," said Jack dryly.

"It is a position of some importance. I mean it is not the mere command of a small vessel," said Marion haughtily; for she was always eager that every incident that befell the family should redound to their distinction, and subserve their onward march to greatness.

"Oh, Jack," whispered Nelly, "let us walk over to the cottage, and tell them the news;" and Jack blushed as he squeezed her hand in gratitude for the speech.

"I almost wonder they gave you this, Jack," said his father, "seeing how active a part I took against them; but I suppose there is some truth in the saying that Ministers would rather soothe enemies than succour friends."

"Don't you suspect, papa, that Lord Culduff may have had some share in this event? His in-

fluence, I know, is very great with his party," said Marion.

"I hope and trust not," burst out Jack; "rather than owe my promotion to that bewigged old dandy, I'd go and keep a lighthouse."

"A most illiberal speech," said Temple. "I was about to employ a stronger word, but still not stronger than my sense of its necessity."

"Remember, Temple," replied Jack, "I have no possible objection to his being *your* patron. I only protest that he shan't be *mine*. He may make you something ordinary or extraordinary to-morrow, and I'll never quarrel about it."

"I am grateful for the concession," said the other, bowing.

"If it was Lord Culduff that got you this step," said Colonel Bramleigh, "I must say nothing could be more delicate than his conduct; he never so much as hinted to me that he had taken trouble in the matter."

"He is *such* a gentleman!" said Marion, with a very enthusiastic emphasis on the word.

"Well, perhaps it's a very ignoble confession," said Nelly, "but I frankly own I'd rather Jack

owed his good fortune to his good fame than to all the peers in the calendar."

"What pains Ellen takes," said Marion, "to show that her ideas of life and the world are not those of the rest of us."

"She has me with her whenever she goes into the lobby," said Jack, "or I'll pair with Temple, who is sure to be on the stronger side."

"Your censure I accept as a compliment," said Temple.

"And is this all our good news has done for us,—to set us exchanging tart speeches and sharp repartees with each other?" said Colonel Bramleigh. "I declare it is a very ungracious way to treat pleasant tidings. Go out, boys, and see if you couldn't find some one to dine with us, and wet Jack's commission as they used to call it long ago."

"We can have the L'Estranges and our amiable neighbour Captain Craufurd," said Marion; "but I believe our resources end with these."

"Why not look up the Frenchman you smashed some weeks ago, Jack?" said Augustus; "he ought to be about by this time, and it would only be common decency to show him some attention."

"With all my heart. I'll do anything you like but talk French with him. But where is he to be found?"

"He stops with Longworth," said Augustus, "which makes the matter awkward. Can we invite one without the other, and can we open our acquaintance with Longworth by an invitation to dinner?"

"Certainly not," chimed in Temple. "First acquaintance admits of no breaches of etiquette. Intimacies may, and rarely too, forgive such."

"What luck to have such a pilot to steer us through the narrow channel of proprieties," cried Jack, laughing.

"I think, too, it would be as well to remember," resumed Temple, "that Lord Culduff is our guest, and to whatever accidents of acquaintanceship we may be ready to expose ourselves, we have no right to extend these casualties to *him*."

"I suspect we are not likely to see his lordship to-day, at least; he has sent down his man to beg he may be excused from making his appearance at dinner: a slight attack of gout confines him to his room," said Marion.

"That's not the worst bit of news I've heard to-

day," broke in Jack. "Dining in that old cove's company is the next thing to being tried by a court-martial. I fervently hope he'll be on the sick list till I take my departure."

"As to getting these people together to-day, it's out of the question," said Augustus. "Let us say Saturday next, and try what we can do."

This was agreed upon, Temple being deputed to ride over to Longworth's, leaving to his diplomacy to make what further advances events seemed to warrant,—a trustful confidence in his tact to conduct a nice negotiation being a flattery more than sufficient to recompense his trouble. Jack and Nelly would repair to the cottage to secure the L'Estranges. Craufurd could be apprised by a note.

"Has Cutbill got the gout, too?" asked Jack. "I have not seen him this morning."

"No; that very cool gentleman took out my cob pony, Fritz, this morning at daybreak," said Augustus, "saying he was off to the mines at Lisconnor, and wouldn't be back till evening."

"And do you mean to let such a liberty pass unnoticed?" asked Temple.

"A good deal will depend upon how Fritz looks after his journey. If I see that the beast has not suffered, it is just possible I may content myself with a mere intimation that I trust the freedom may not be repeated."

"You told me Anderson offered you two hundred for that cob," broke in Temple.

"Yes, and asked how much more would tempt me to sell him."

"If he were a peer of the realm, and took such a liberty with me, I'd not forgive him," said Temple, as he arose and left the room in a burst of indignation.

"I may say we are a very high-spirited family," said Jack gravely, "and I'll warn the world not to try any familiarities with us."

"Come away, naughty boy," whispered Eleanor; "you are always trailing your coat for some one to stand upon."

"Tell me, Nelly," said he, as they took their way through the pinewood that led to the cottage, "tell me, Nelly, am I right or wrong in my appreciation—for I really want to be just and fair in the matter—are we Bramleighs confounded snobs?"

The downright honest earnestness with which he put the question made her laugh heartily, and for some seconds left her unable to answer him.

"I half suspect that we may be, Jack," said she, still smiling.

"I'm certain of one thing," continued he in the same earnest tone, "our distinguished guest deems us such. There is a sort of simpering enjoyment of all that goes on around him, and a condescending approval of us that seems to say, 'Go on, you'll catch the tone yet. You're not doing badly by any means.' He pushed me to the very limit of my patience the other day with this, and I had to get up from luncheon and leave the house to avoid being openly rude to him. Do you mind my lighting a cigar, Nelly, for I've got myself so angry that I want a weed to calm me down again?"

"Let us talk of something else; for on this theme I'm not much better tempered than yourself."

"There's a dear good girl," said he, drawing her towards him, and kissing her cheek. "I'd have sworn you felt as I did about this old fop; and we must be arrant snobs, Nelly, or else his coming down amongst us here would not have

broken us all up, setting us exchanging sneers and scoffs, and criticizing each other's knowledge of life. Confound the old humbug; let us forget him."

They walked along without exchanging a word for full ten minutes or more, till they reached the brow of the cliff, from which the pathway led down to the cottage. "I wonder when I shall stand here again?" said he, pausing. "Not that I'm going on any hazardous service, or to meet a more formidable enemy than a tart flag-captain; but the world has such strange turns and changes, that a couple of years may do anything with a man's destiny."

"A couple of years may make you a post-captain, Jack; and that will be quite enough to change your destiny."

He looked affectionately towards her for a moment, and then turned away to hide the emotion he could not master.

"And then, Jack," said she, caressingly, "it will be a very happy day that shall bring us to this spot again."

"Who knows, Nelly?" said he, with a degree of agitation that surprised her. "I haven't told

you that Julia and I had a quarrel the last time we met."

"A quarrel!"

"Well, it was something very like one. I told her there were things about her manner,—certain ways she had,—that I didn't like; and I spoke very seriously to her on the subject. I didn't go beating about, but said she was too much of a coquette."

"Oh, Jack!"

"It's all very well to be shocked, and cry out, 'Oh, Jack!' but isn't it true? haven't you seen it yourself? hasn't Marion said some very strange things about it?"

"My dear Jack, I needn't tell you that we girls are not always fair in our estimates of each other, even when we think we are,—and it is not always that we want to think so. Julia is not a coquette in any sense that the word carries censure, and you were exceedingly wrong to tell her she was."

"That's how it is!" cried he, pitching his cigar away in impatience. "There's a freemasonry amongst you that calls you all to arms the moment one is attacked. Isn't it open to a man to tell the girl he hopes to make his wife that there are things in

her manner he doesn't approve of and would like changed?"

"Certainly not; at least it would require some nicer tact than yours to approach such a theme with safety."

"Temple, perhaps, could do it," said he, sneeringly.

"Temple certainly would not attempt it."

Jack made a gesture of impatience, and, as if desirous to change the subject, said, "What's the matter with our distinguished guest? Is he ill, that he won't dine below-stairs to day?"

"He calls it a slight return of his Greek fever, and begs to be excused from presenting himself at dinner."

"He and Temple have been writing little three-cornered notes to each other all the morning. I suppose it is diplomatic usage."

The tone of irritation he spoke in seemed to show that he was actually seeking for something to vent his anger upon, and trying to provoke some word of contradiction or dissent; but she was silent, and for some seconds they walked on without speaking.

"Look!" cried he, suddenly; "there goes Julia. Do you see her yonder on the path up the cliff; and who is that clambering after her? I'll be shot if it's not Lord Culduff."

"Julia has got her drawing-book, I see. They're on some sketching excursion."

"He wasn't long in throwing off his Greek fever, eh?" cried Jack, indignantly. "It's cool, isn't it, to tell the people in whose house he is stopping that he is too ill to dine with them, and then set out gallivanting in this fashion?"

"Poor old man!" said she, in a tone of half scornful pity.

"Was I right about Julia now?" cried he, angrily. "I told you for whose captivation all her little gracefulnesses were intended. I saw it the first night he stood beside her at the piano. As Marion said, she is determined to bring him down. She saw it as well as I did."

"What nonsense you are talking, Jack; as if Julia would condescend——"

"There's no condescension, Nelly," he broke in. "The man is a lord, and the woman he marries will be a peeress, and there's not another country in

Europe in which that word means as much. I take it, we needn't go on to the cottage now?"

"I suppose we could scarcely overtake them?"

"Overtake them! Why should we try? Even *my* tact, Nelly, that you sneered at so contemptuously a while ago, would save me from such a blunder. Come, let's go home and forget, if we can, all that we came about. *I* at least will try and do so."

"My dear dear Jack, this is very foolish jealousy."

"I am not jealous, Nelly. I'm angry; but it is with myself. I ought to have known what humble pretensions mine were, and I ought to have known how certainly a young lady, bred as young ladies are now-a-days, would regard them as less than humble; but it all comes of this idle shore-going good-for-nothing life. They'll not catch me at it again, that's all."

"Just listen to me patiently, Jack. Listen to me for one moment."

"Not for half a moment. I can guess everything you want to say to me, and I tell you frankly, I don't care to hear it. Tell me whatever you like to-morrow —" He tried to finish his speech, but his voice

grew thick and faltering, and he turned away and was silent.

They spoke little to each other as they walked homewards. A chance remark on the weather, or the scenery, was all that passed till they reached the little lawn before the door.

"You'll not forget your pledge, Jack, for to-morrow?" said Ellen, as he turned towards her before ascending the steps.

"I'll not forget it," said he, coldly, and he moved off as he spoke, and entered an alley of the shrubbery.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DULL DINNER.

THE family dinner on that day at Castello was somewhat dull. The various attempts to secure a party for the ensuing Saturday, which had been fixed on to celebrate Jack's promotion, had proved failures. When Temple arrived at Longworth's he learned that the host and his guest were from home and not to return for some days—we have seen how it fared as to the L'Estranges—so that the solitary success was Captain Craufurd, a gentleman who certainly had not won the suffrages of the Great House.

There were two vacant places besides at the table; for butlers are fond of recording, by napkins and covers, how certain of our friends assume to treat us, and thus as it were contrast their own formal observances of duty with the laxer notions of their betters.

"Lord Culduff is not able to dine with us," said

Colonel Bramleigh, making the apology as well to himself as to the company.

"No, papa," said Marion; "he hopes to appear in the drawing-room in the evening."

"If not too much tired by his long walk," broke in Jack.

"What walk are you dreaming of?" asked Marion.

"An excursion he made this morning down the coast, sketching or pretending to sketch. Nelly and I saw him clambering up the side of a cliff——"

"Oh, quite impossible; you must be mistaken.

"No," said Nelly, "there was no mistake. I saw him as plainly as I see you now; besides, it is not in these wild regions so distinguished a figure is like to find its counterpart."

"But why should he not take his walk? why not sketch, or amuse himself in any way he pleased?" asked Temple.

"Of course it was open to him to do so," said the colonel; "only that to excuse his absence he ought not to have made a pretext of being ill."

"I think men are 'ill' just as they are 'out,'" said Temple. "I am ill if I am asked to do what is

disagreeable to me, as I am out to the visit of a bore."

"So that to dine with us was disagreeable to Lord Culduff?" asked Jack.

"It was evidently either an effort to task his strength, or an occasion which called for more exertion than he felt equal to," said Temple, pompously.

"By Jove!" cried Jack, "I hope I'll never be a great man! I trust sincerely *I* may never arrive at that eminence in which it will task my energies to eat my dinner and chat with the people on either side of me."

"Lord Culduff converses: he does not chat; please to note the distinction, Jack."

"That's like telling me he doesn't walk but he swaggers."

It was fortunate at this moment, critical enough as regarded the temper of all parties, that Mr. Cutbill entered, full of apologies for being late, and bursting to recount the accidents that befell him and all the incidents of his day. A quick glance around the table assured him of Lord Culduff's absence, and it was evident from the sparkle of his eye that the event was not disagreeable to him.

"Is our noble friend on the sick list?" asked he with a smile.

"Indisposed," said Temple, with the air of one who knew the value of a word that was double-shotted.

"I've got news that will soon rally him," continued Cutbill. "They've struck a magnificent vein this morning, and within eighty yards of the surface. Plmmys, the Welsh inspector, pronounced it good Cardiff, and says, from the depth of 'the lode' that it must go a long way."

"Harding did not give me as encouraging news yesterday," said Colonel Bramleigh with a dubious smile.

"My tidings date from this morning,—yesterday was the day before the battle; besides, what does Harding know about coal?"

"He knows a little about everything," said Augustus.

"That makes all the difference. What people want is not the men who know things currently, but know them well and thoroughly. Eh, captain," said he to Jack, "what would you say to popular notions about the navy?"

"Cutty's right," said Jack. "Amateurship is all humbug."

"Who is Longworth?" asked Cutbill. "Philip Longworth?"

"A neighbour of ours; we are not acquainted, but we know that there is such a person," said Colonel Bramleigh.

"He opines," continued Cutbill, "that this vein of ours runs direct from his land, and I suspect he's not wrong; and he wants to know what we mean to do—he'll either sell or buy. He came over this morning to Kilmannock with a French friend, and we took our breakfast together. Nice fellows both of them, and wide awake, too, especially the Frenchman. He was with Lesseps in Egypt, in what capacity I couldn't find out; but I see he's a shrewd fellow."

"With Lesseps," said Colonel Bramleigh, showing a quicker and more eager interest than before, for his lawyer had told him that the French claimant to his property had been engaged on the works of the Suez Canal.

"Yes; he spoke as if he knew Lesseps well, and talked of the whole undertaking like one who understood it."

"And what is he doing here?"

"Writing a book, I fancy; an Irish tour—one of those mock-sentimentalities, with bad politics and false morality, Frenchmen ventilate about England. He goes poking into the cabins and asking the people about their grievances; and now he says he wants to hear the other side, and learn what the gentlemen say."

"We'll have to ask him over here," said Colonel Bramleigh coolly, as if the thought had occurred to him then for the first time.

"He'll amuse you, I promise you," said Cutbill.

"I'd like to meet him," said Jack. "I had the ill-luck to bowl him over in the hunting-field, and cost him a broken leg. I'd like to make all the excuses in my power to him."

"He bears no malice about it; he said it was all his own fault, and that you did your best to pick him up, but your horse bolted with you."

"Let's have him to dinner by all means," said Augustus; "and now that Temple has made a formal visit, I take it we might invite him by a polite note."

"You must wait till he returns the call," said Marion stiffly.

"Not if we want to show a courteous desire to make his acquaintance," said Temple. "Attentions can be measured as nicely and as minutely as medicaments."

"All I say," said Jack, "is, have him soon, or I may chance to miss him; and I'm rather curious to have a look at him."

Colonel Bramleigh turned a full look at Jack, as though his words had some hidden meaning in them, but the frank and easy expression of the sailor's face reassured him at once.

"I hope the fellow won't put us in his book," said Temple. "You are never quite safe with these sort of people."

"Are we worth recording?" asked Jack with a laugh.

Temple was too indignant to make any answer, and Cutbill went on. "The authorship is only a suspicion of mine, remember. It was from seeing him constantly jotting down little odds and ends in his note-book that I came to that conclusion; and Frenchmen are not much given to minute inquiries if they have not some definite object in view."

Again was Bramleigh's attention arrested, but as before, he saw that the speaker meant no more than the words in their simplest acceptance conveyed.

A violent ringing of the door-bell startled the company, and after a moment's pause of expectancy, a servant entered to say, that a Government messenger had arrived with some important despatches for Lord Culduff, which required personal delivery and acceptance.

"Will you step up, Mr. Cutbill, and see if his lordship is in his room?"

"I'll answer for it he's not," said Jack to his father.

Cutbill rose, however, and went on his mission, but instead of returning to the dining-room it was perceived that he proceeded to find the messenger, and conduct him upstairs.

"Well, Nelly," said Marion, in a whisper, "what do you say now, is it so certain that it was Lord Culduff you saw this morning?"

"I don't know what to make of it. I was fully as sure as Jack was."

"I'll wager he's been offered Paris," said Temple, gravely.

"Offered Paris?" cried Jack; "what do you mean?"

"I mean the embassy, of course," replied he contemptuously. "Without," added he, "they want him in the Cabinet."

"And is it really by men like this, the country is governed?" said Nelly, with a boldness that seemed the impulse of indignation.

"I'm afraid so," said Marion scornfully. "Mr. Canning and Lord Palmerston were men very like this,—were they not, Temple!"

"Precisely; Lord Culduff is exactly of the same order, however humble the estimate Ellen may form of such people."

"I'm all impatience for the news," said Augustus. "I wish Cutbill would come down at once."

"I'll take the odds that he goes to F. O.," said Temple.

"What the deuce could he do in China?" cried Jack, whose ear had led him into a cruel blunder.

Temple scarcely smiled at what savoured of actual irreverence, and added, "If so, I'll ask to be made private secretary."

"Mr. Temple, sir, his lordship would be glad to

see you upstairs for a moment," said a footman, entering. And Temple arose and left the room, with a pride that might have accompanied him if summoned to a cabinet council.

"More mysteries of State," cried Jack. "I declare, girls, the atmosphere of political greatness is almost suffocating me. I wonder how Cutty stands it!"

A general move into the drawing-room followed this speech, and as Jack sauntered in he slipped his arm within Nelly's and led her towards a window. "I can't bear this any longer, Nelly,—I must trip my anchor and move away. I'd as soon be lieutenant to a port admiral as live here. You're all grown too fine for me.'"

"That's not it at all, Jack," said she, smiling. "I see how you've been trying to bully yourself by bullying us this hour back; but it will be all right to-morrow. We'll go over to the cottage after breakfast."

"You may; *I'll* not, I promise you," said he, blushing deeply.

"Yes, you will, my dear Jack," said she, coaxingly; "and you'll be the first to laugh at your own

foolish jealousy besides,—if Julia is not too angry with you to make laughing possible."

"She may be angry or pleased, it's all one to me now," said he passionately. "When I told her she was a coquette, I didn't believe it; but, by Jove, she has converted me to the opinion pretty quickly."

"You're a naughty boy, and you're in a bad humour, and I'll say no more to you now."

"Say it now, I advise you, if you mean to say it," said he shortly; but she laughed at his serious face, and turned away without speaking.

"Isn't the cabinet council sitting late," asked Augustus of Marion. "They have been nigh two hours in conference."

"I take it it must be something of importance," replied she.

"Isn't Cutbill in it?" asked Augustus, mockingly.

"I saw Mr. Cutbill go down the avenue, with his cigar in his mouth, just after we came into the drawing-room."

"I'll go and try to pump him," said Jack. "One might do a grand thing on the Stock Exchange if he could get at State secrets like these." And as Jack went out a silence fell over the party, only

broken by the heavy breathing of Colonel Bramleigh as he slept behind his newspaper. At last the door opened gently, and Temple moved quietly across the room, and tapping his father on the shoulder, whispered something in his ear. "What—eh?" cried Colonel Bramleigh, waking up. "Did you say 'out'?" Another whisper ensued, and the colonel arose and left the room, followed by Temple.

"Isn't Temple supremely diplomatic to-night?" said Nelly.

"I'm certain he is behaving with every becoming reserve and decorum," said Marion, in a tone of severe rebuke.

When Colonel Bramleigh entered the library, Temple closed and locked the door, and in a voice of some emotion said, "Poor Lord Culduff; it's a dreadful blow. I don't know how he'll bear up against it."

"I don't understand it," said Bramleigh, peevishly. "What's this about a change of Ministry and a dissolution? Did you tell me the Parliament was dissolved?"

"No, sir. I said that a dissolution was probable. The Ministry have been sorely pressed in the Lords about Culduff's appointment, and a motion to address

the Crown to cancel it has only been met by a majority of three. So small a victory amounts to a defeat, and the Premier writes to beg Lord Culduff will at once send in his resignation, as the only means to save the party."

"Well, if it's the only thing to do, why not do it?"

"Culduff takes a quite different view of it. He says that to retire is to abdicate his position in public life; that it was Lord Rigglesworth's duty to stand by a colleague to the last; that every Minister makes it a point of honour to defend a subordinate; and that——"

"I only half follow you. What was the ground of the attack? Had he fallen into any blunder—made any serious mistake?"

"Nothing of the kind, sir; they actually complimented his abilities, and spoke of his rare capacity. It was one of those bursts of hypocrisy we have every now and then in public life, to show the world how virtuous we are. They raked up an old story of thirty years ago of some elopement or other, and affected to see in this escapade a reason against his being employed to represent the Crown."

"I'm not surprised—not at all surprised. There is a strong moral feeling in the heart of the nation, that no man, however great his abilities, can outrage with impunity."

"If they dealt with him thus hardly in the Lords, we can fancy how he will be treated in the Lower House, where Rigby Norton has given notice of a motion respecting his appointment. As Lord Rigglesworth writes, 'R. N. has got up your whole biography, and is fully bent on making you the theme of one of his amusing scurrilities. Is it wise, is it safe to risk this? He'll not persevere, —he could not persevere,—in his motion, if you send in your resignation. We could not—at least so Gore, our whip, says—be sure of a majority were we to divide; and even a majority of, say thirty, to proclaim you moral, would only draw the whole press to open your entire life, and make the world ring with your, I suppose, very common and every-day iniquities.'"

"I declare I do not see what can be alleged against this advice. It seems to me most forcible and irrefragable."

"Very forcible, as regards the position of the

Cabinet; but, as Lord Culduff says, ruin, positive ruin to him."

"Ruin of his own causing."

Temple shrugged his shoulders in a sort of contemptuous impatience; the sentiment was one not worth a reply.

"At all events, has he any other course open to him?"

"He thinks he has; at least, he thinks, that, with your help and co-operation, there may be another course. The attack is to come from below the gangway on the Opposition side. It was to sit with these men you contested a county, and spent nigh twenty thousand pounds. You have great claims on the party. You know them all personally, and have much influence with them. Why, then, not employ it in his behalf?"

"To suppress the motion, you mean?"

Temple nodded.

"They'd not listen to it, not endure it for a moment. Norton wouldn't give up an attack for which he had prepared himself, if he were to find out in the interval that the object of it was an angel. As I heard him say one day at 'the Reform,'

'Other men have their specialities. One fellow takes sugar, one the malt-duties, one Servia, or may be, Ireland; my line is a good smashing personality. Show me a fellow—of course I mean a political opponent—who has been giving himself airs as a colonial governor, or "swelling" it as a special envoy at a foreign court, and if I don't find something in his despatches to exhibit him as a false prophet, a dupe, or a blunderer, and if I can't make the House laugh at him, don't call me Rigby Norton.' He knows he does these things better than any man in England, and he does them in a spirit that never makes him an enemy."

"Culduff says that N. is terribly hard up. He was hit heavily at Goodwood, and asked for time to pay."

"Just what he has been doing for the last twenty years. There are scores of ships that no underwriters would accept making safe voyages half across the globe. No, no, he'll rub on for many a day in the same fashion. Besides, if he shouldn't, what then?"

Temple made a significant gesture with his thumb in the palm of his hand.

"That's all your noble friend knows about England, then. See what comes of a man passing his life among foreigners. I suppose a Spanish or an Italian deputy mightn't give much trouble, nor oppose any strenuous resistance to such a dealing; but it won't do here—it will not."

"Lord Culduff knows the world as well as most men, sir."

"Yes, one world, I'm sure he does! A world of essenced old dandies and painted dowagers, surrounded by thieving lacqueys and cringing followers; where everything can be done by bribery, and nothing without it. But that's not England, I'm proud to say; nor will it be, I hope, for many a day to come."

"I wish, sir, you could be induced to give your aid to Culduff in this matter. I need not say what an influence it would exert over my own fortunes."

"You must win your way, Temple, by your own merits," said he, haughtily. "I'd be ashamed to think that a son of mine owed any share of his success in life to ignoble acts or backstairs influence. Go back and tell Lord Culduff from me, that so far as I know it, Lord Rigglesworth's advice is my own. No wise man ever courts a public scandal;

and he would be less than wise to confront one, with the certainty of being overwhelmed by it."

"Will you see him, sir? Will you speak to him yourself?"

"I'd rather not. It would be a needless pain to each of us."

"I suspect he means to leave this to-night."

"Not the worst thing he could do."

"But you'll see him, to say good-by?"

"Certainly; and all the more easily if we have no conversation in the meanwhile. Who's that knocking? Is the door locked?"

Temple hastened to open the door, and found Mr. Cutbill begging to have five minutes' conversation with Colonel Bramleigh.

"Leave us together, Temple, and tell Marion to send me in some tea. You'll have tea, too, won't you, Mr. Cutbill?"

"No, thank you; I'll ask for wine and water later. At present I want a little talk with you. Our noble friend has got it hot and heavy," said he, as Temple withdrew, leaving Bramleigh and himself together; "but it's nothing to what will come out when Norton brings it before the House.

I suppose there hasn't been such a scandal for years as he'll make of it."

"I declare, Mr. Cutbill, as long as the gentleman continues my guest, I'd rather avoid than invite any discussion of his antecedents," said Bramleigh pompously.

"All very fine, if you could stop the world from talking of them."

"My son has just been with me, and I have said to him, sir, as I have now repeated to you, that it is a theme I will not enter upon."

"You won't, won't you?"

"No, sir, I will not."

"The more fool you, then, that's all."

"What, sir, am I to be told this to my face, under my own roof? Can you presume to address these words to me?"

"I meant nothing offensive. You needn't look like a turkey-cock. All the gobble-gobble in the world wouldn't frighten *me*. I came in here in a friendly spirit. I was handsomely treated in this house, and I'd like to make a return for it: that's why I'm here, Bramleigh."

"You will pardon me if I do not detect the

friendliness you speak of in the words you have just uttered."

"Perhaps I was a little too blunt—a little too—what shall I call it?—abrupt; but what I wanted to say was this: here's the nicest opportunity in the world, not only to help a lame dog over the stile, but to make a good hound of him afterwards."

"I protest, sir, I cannot follow you. Your bluntness, as you call it, was at least intelligible."

"Don't be in a passion. Keep cool, and listen to me. If this motion is made about Culduff, and comes to a debate, there will be such stories told as would smash forty reputations. I'd like to see which of us would come well out of a biography, treated as a party attack in the House of Commons. At all events *he* couldn't face it. Stand by him, then, and get him through it. Have patience; just hear what I have to say. The thing can be done; there's eight days to come before it can be brought on. I know the money-lender has three of Norton's acceptances—for heavy sums, two of them. Do you see now what I'm driving at?"

"I may possibly see so much, sir, but I am unable to see why I should move in the matter."

"I'll show you, then. The noble viscount is much smitten by a certain young lady upstairs, and intends to propose for her. Yes, I know it, and I'll vouch for it. Your eldest daughter may be a peeress, and though the husband isn't very young, neither is the title. I think he said he was the eighth lord—seventh or eighth, I'm not sure which—and taking the rank and the coal-mine together, don't you think she might do worse?"

"I will say, sir, that frankness like yours I've never met before."

"That's the very thing I'd like to hear you say of me. There's no quality I pride myself on so much as my candour."

"You have ample reason, sir."

"I feel it. I know it. Direct lines and a wide gauge—I mean in the way of liberality—that's my motto. I go straight to my terminus, wherever it is."

"It is not every man can make his profession the efficient ally of his morality."

"An engineer can, and there's nothing so like life as a new line of railroad. But to come back. You see now how the matter stands. If the arrangement suits you, the thing can be done."

"You have a very business-like way of treating these themes."

"If I hadn't, I couldn't treat them at all. What I say to myself is, Will it pay? first of all, and secondly, How much will it pay? And that's the one test for everything. Have the divines a more telling argument against a life of worldliness and self-indulgence than when they ask, Will it pay? We contract for everything, even for going to heaven."

"If I could hope to rival your eminently practical spirit, Mr. Cutbill, I'd ask how far—to what extent—has Lord Culduff made you the confidant of his intentions?"

"You mean, has he sent me here this evening to make a proposal to you?"

"No, not exactly that; but has he intimated, has he declared—for intimation wouldn't suffice—has he declared his wish to be allied to my family."

"He didn't say, 'Cutbill, go down and make a tender in my name for her,' if you mean that."

"I opine not, sir," said Bramleigh haughtily.

"But when I tell you it's all right," said Cutbill, with one of his most knowing looks, "I think that ought to do."

"I take it, sir, that you mean courteously and fairly by me. I feel certain that you have neither the wish nor the intention to pain me, but I am forced to own that you import into questions of a delicate nature a spirit of commercial profit and loss, which makes all discussion of them harsh and disagreeable. This is not, let me observe to you, a matter of coal or a new cutting on a railroad."

"And are you going to tell Tom Cutbill that out of his own line of business—when he isn't up to his knees in earthworks, and boring a tunnel—that he's a fool and a nincompoop?"

"I should be sorry to express such a sentiment."

"Ay, or feel it; why don't you say that?"

"I will go even so far, sir, and say I should be sorry to feel it."

"That's enough. No offence meant, none is taken. Here's how it is now. Authorize me to see Joel about those bills of Norton's. Give me what the French call a *carte blanche* to negotiate, and I'll promise you I'll not throw your ten-pound notes away. Not that it need ever come to ten-pound notes, for Rigby does these things for the pure fun of them, and if any good fellow drops in

on him of a morning, and says, 'Don't raise a hue and cry about that poor beggar,' or 'Don't push that fellow over the cliff,' he's just the man to say, 'Well, I'll not go on. I'll let it stand over,' or he'll even get up and say, 'When I asked leave to put this question to the right honourable gentleman, I fully believed in the authentic character of the information in my possession. I have, however, since then discovered'—this, that, and the other. Don't you know how these things always finish? There's a great row, a great hubbub, and the man that retracts is always cheered by both sides of the House."

"Suppose, then, he withdraws his motion,—what then? The discussion in the Lords remains on record, and the mischief, so far as Lord Culduff is concerned, is done."

"I know that. He'll not have his appointment; he'll take his pension and wait. What he says is this, 'There are only three diplomatists in all England, and short of a capital felony, any of the three may do anything. I have only to stand out and sulk,' says he, 'and they'll be on their knees to me yet.'"

"He yields, then, to a passing hurricane," said Bramleigh, pompously.

"Just so. He's taking shelter under an archway till he can call a hansom. Now you have the whole case; and as talking is dry work, might I ring for a glass of sherry and seltzer?"

"By all means. I am ashamed not to have thought of it before. This is a matter for much thought and deliberation," said Bramleigh, as the servant withdrew after bringing the wine. "It is too eventful a step to be taken suddenly."

"If not done promptly it can't be done at all. A week isn't a long time to go up to town and get through a very knotty negotiation. Joel isn't a common money-lender, like Drake or Downie. You can't go to his office except on formal business. If you want to do a thing in the way of accommodation with him, you'll have to take him down to the 'Ship,' and give him a nice little fish dinner, with the very best Sauterne you can find; and when you're sitting out on the balcony over the black mud,—the favourite spot men smoke their cheroots in,—then open your business; and though he knows well it was all 'a plant,' he'll not resent it, but take it kindly and well."

"I am certain that so nice a negotiation

could not be in better hands than yours, Mr. Cutbill."

"Well, perhaps I might say without vanity, it might be in worse. So much for that part of the matter; now, as to the noble viscount himself. I am speaking as a man of the world to another man of the world, and speaking in confidence too. *You* don't join in that hypocritical cant against Culduff, because he had once in his life been what they call a man of gallantry? I mean, Bramleigh, that *you* don't go in for that outrageous humbug of spotless virtue, and the rest of it?"

Bramleigh smiled, and as he passed his hand over his mouth to hide a laugh, the twinkle of his eyes betrayed him.

"I believe I am old enough to know that one must take the world as it is pleased to present itself," said he cautiously.

"And not want to think it better or worse than it really is?"

Bramleigh nodded assent.

"Now we understand each other, as I told you the other evening we were sure to do when we had seen more of each other. Culduff isn't a saint, but

he's a Peer of Parliament; he isn't young, but he has an old title, and if I'm not much mistaken, he'll make a pot of money out of this mine. Such a man has only to go down into the Black Country or amongst the mills, to have his choice of some of the best-looking girls in England, with a quarter of a million of money; isn't that fact?"

"It is pretty like it."

"So that, on the whole, I'll say this is a good thing, Bramleigh,—a right good thing. As Wishart said the other night in the House, 'A new country,' —speaking of the States,—'a new country wants alliances with old States;' so a new family wants connection with the old historic houses."

Colonel Bramleigh's face grew crimson, but he coughed to keep down his rising indignation, and slightly bowed his head.

"*You* know as well as *I* do, that the world has only two sorts of people, nobs and snobs; one has no choice,—if you're not one, you must be the other."

"And yet, sir, men of mind and intellect have written about the untitled nobility of England."

"Silver without the hall-mark, Bramleigh, won't

bring six shillings an ounce, just because nobody can say how far it's adulterated; it's the same with people."

"Your tact, sir, is on a par with your wisdom."

"And perhaps you haven't a high opinion of either," said Cutbill, with a laugh that showed he felt no irritation whatever. "But look here, Bramleigh, this will never do. If there's nothing but blarney or banter between us we'll never come to business. If you agree to what I've been proposing —you have only *me* to deal with, the noble lord isn't in the game at all,—he'll leave this to-night,—it's right and proper he should; he'll go up to the mines for a few days, and amuse himself with quartz and red sandstone; and when I write or telegraph, —most likely telegraph,—'The thing is safe,' he'll come back here and make his proposal in all form."

"I am most willing to give my assistance to any project that may rescue Lord Culduff from this unpleasant predicament. Indeed, having myself experienced some of the persecution which political hatred can carry into private life, I feel a sort of common cause with him; but I protest at the same time—distinctly protest—against anything like a

pledge as regards his lordship's views towards one of my family. I mean I give no promise."

"I see," said Cutbill, with a look of intense cunning. "You'll do the money part. Providence will take charge of the rest. Isn't that it?"

"Mr. Cutbill, you occasionally push my patience pretty hard. What I said, I said seriously and advisedly."

"Of course. Now then, give me a line to your banker to acknowledge my draft up to a certain limit, say five hundred. I think five ought to do it."

"It's a smart sum, Mr. Cutbill."

"The article's cheap at the money. Well, well, I'll not anger you. Write me the order, and let me be off."

Bramleigh sat down at his table, and wrote off a short note to his junior partner in the bank, which he sealed and addressed, and handing it to Cutbill said, "This will credit you to the amount you spoke of. It will be advanced to you as a loan without interest, to be repaid within two years."

"All right; the thought of repayment will never spoil my night's rest. I only wish all my debts would give me as little trouble."

"You ought to have none, Mr. Cutbill; a man of your abilities, at the top of a great profession, and with a reputation second to none, should, if he were commonly prudent, have ample means at his disposal."

"But that's the thing I am not, Bramleigh. I'm not one of your safe fellows. I drive my engine at speed, even where the line is shaky and the rails ill laid. Good-by; my respects to the ladies; tell Jack, if he's in town within a week to look me up at 'Limmer's.'" He emptied the sherry into a tumbler as he spoke, drank it off, and left the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DEPARTURE.

Some days had gone over since the scene just recorded in our last chapter, and the house at Castello presented a very different aspect from its late show of movement and pleasure.

Lord Culduff, on the pretence of his presence being required at the mines, had left on the same night that Cutbill took his departure for England. On the morning after Jack also went away. He had passed the night writing and burning letters to Julia; for no sooner had he finished an epistle, than he found it too cruel, too unforgiving, too unfeeling, by half; and when he endeavoured to moderate his just anger, he discovered signs of tenderness in his reproaches that savoured of submission. It would not be quite fair to be severe on Jack's failures, trying as he was to do what has puzzled much wiser

and craftier heads than his. To convey all the misery he felt at parting from her with a just measure of reproach for her levity towards him, to mete out his love and his anger in due doses, to say enough, but never too much, and finally to let her know that, though he went off in a huff, it was to carry her image in his heart through all his wanderings, never forgetting her for a moment, whether he was carrying despatches to Cadiz or coaling at Corfu—to do all these, I say, becomingly and well, was not an easy task, and especially for one who would rather have been sent to cut out a frigate under the guns of a fortress than indite a despatch to "my Lords of the Admiralty."

From the short sleep which followed all his abortive attempts at a letter he was awakened by his servant telling him it was time to dress and be off. Drearier moments there are not in life than those which herald in a departure of a dark morning in winter, with the rain swooping in vast sheets against the window-panes, and the cold blast whistling through the leafless trees. Never do the candles seem to throw so little light as these do now through the dreary room, all littered and disordered by the

preparations for the road. What fears and misgivings beset one at such a moment! What reluctance to go, and what a positive sense of fear one feels, as though the journey were a veritable leap in the dark, and that the whole fortunes of a life were dependent on that instant of resolution.

Poor Jack tried to battle with such thoughts as these by reminding himself of his duty and the calls of the service; he asked himself again and again, if it were out of such vacillating, wavering materials, a sailor's heart should be fashioned? was this the stuff that made Nelsons or Collingwoods? And though there was but little immediate prospect of a career of distinction, his sense of duty taught him to feel that the routine life of peace was a greater trial to a man's patience than all the turmoil and bustle of active service.

"The more I cling to remain here," muttered he, as he descended the stairs, "the more certain am I that it's pure weakness and folly."

"What's that you are muttering about weakness and folly, Jack?" said Nelly, who had got up to see him off, and give him the last kiss before he departed.

"How came it you are here, Nelly? Get back to your bed, girl, or you'll catch a terrible cold."

"No, no, Jack; I'm well shawled and muffled. I wanted to say good-by once more. Tell me what it was you were saying about weakness and folly."

"I was assuring myself that my reluctance to go away was nothing less than folly. I was trying to persuade myself that the best thing I could do was to be off; but I won't say I have succeeded."

"But it is, Jack; rely on it, it is. You are doing the right thing; and if I say so, it is with a heavy heart, for I shall be very lonely after you."

Passing his arm round her waist, he walked with her up and down the great spacious hall, their slow footsteps echoing in the silent house.

"If my last meeting with her had not been such as it was, Nelly," said he, falteringly; "if we had not parted in anger, I think I could go with a lighter heart."

"But don't you know Julia well enough to know that these little storms of temper pass away so rapidly that they never leave a trace behind them? She was angry, not because you found fault with her, but because she thought you had suffered yourself to be persuaded she was in the wrong."

"What do I care for these subtleties? She ought to have known that when a man loves a girl as I love her, he has a right to tell her frankly if there's anything in her manner he is dissatisfied with."

"He has no such right; and if he had, he ought to be very careful how he exercised it."

"And why so?"

"Just because fault-finding is not love-making."

"So that, no matter what he saw that he disliked or disapproved of, he ought to bear it all rather than risk the chance of his remonstrance being ill taken?"

"Not that, Jack; but he ought to take time and opportunity to make the same remonstrance. You don't go down to the girl you are in love with, and call her to account as you would summon a dockyard-man or a rigger for something that was wrong with your frigate."

"Take an illustration from something you know better, Nelly, for I'd do nothing of the kind; but if I saw what, in the conduct or even in the manner of the girl I was in love with, I wouldn't stand if she were my wife, it will be hard to convince me that I oughtn't to tell her of it."

"As I said before, Jack, the telling is a matter of

time and opportunity. Of all the jealousies in the world there is none as inconsiderate as that of lovers towards the outer world. Whatever change either may wish for in the other must never come suggested from without."

"And didn't I tell her she was wrong in supposing that it was Marion made me see her coquetry?"

"That you thought Marion had no influence over your judgment she might believe readily enough, but girls have a keener insight into each other than you are aware of, and she was annoyed—and she was right to be annoyed—that in your estimate of her there should enter anything, the very smallest, that could bespeak the sort of impression a woman might have conveyed."

"Nelly, all this is too deep for me. If Julia cared for me as I believe she had, she'd have taken what I said in good part. Didn't I give up smoking of a morning, except one solitary cheroot after breakfast, when she asked me? Who ever saw me take a nip of brandy of a forenoon since that day she cried out, 'Shame, Jack, don't do that?' And do you think I wasn't as fond of my weed and my glass of

schnaps as ever she was of all those little airs and graces she puts on to make fools of men?"

"Carriage waiting, sir," said a servant, entering with a mass of cloaks and rugs on his arm.

"Confound the carriage and the journey too," muttered he below his breath. "Look here, Nelly, if you are right, and I hope with all my heart you are, I'll not go."

"That would be ruin, Jack; you must go."

"What do I care for the service? A good seaman—a fellow that knows how to handle a ship—need never want for employment. I'd just as soon be a skipper as wear a pair of swabs on my shoulders and be sworn at by some crusty old rear-admiral for a stain on my quarter-deck. I'll not go, Nelly; tell Ned to take off the trunks; I'll stay where I am."

"Oh, Jack, I implore you not to wreck your whole fortune in life. It is just because Julia loves you that you are bound to show yourself worthy of her. You know how lucky you were to get this chance. You said only yesterday it was the finest station in the whole world. Don't lose it, like a dear fellow,—don't do what will be the embitterment of your entire life, the loss of your rank, and—the

——" She stopped as she was about to add something still stronger.

"I'll go then, Nelly; don't cry about it; if you sob that way I'll make a fool of myself. Pretty sight for the flunkies, to see a sailor crying, wouldn't it? all because he had to join his ship. I'll go then at once. I suppose you'll see her to-day, or to-morrow at farthest?"

"I'm not sure, Jack. Marion said something about hunting parsons, I believe, which gave George such deep pain that he wouldn't come here on Wednesday. Julia appears to be more annoyed than George, and, in fact, for the moment, we have quarantined each other."

"Isn't this too bad?" cried he passionately.

"Of course it is too bad; but it's only a passing cloud; and by the time I shall write to you it will have passed away."

Jack clasped her affectionately in his arms, kissed her twice, and sprang into the carriage, and drove away with a full heart indeed; but also with the fast assurance that his dear sister would watch over his interests and not forget him.

That dark drive went over like a hideous dream.

He heard the wind and the rain, the tramp of the horses' feet and the splash of the wheels along the miry road, but he never fully realized where he was or how he come there. The first bell was ringing as he drove into the station, and there was but little time to get down his luggage and secure his ticket. He asked for a coupé, that he might be alone; and being known as one of the great family at Castello, the obsequious station-master hastened to instal him at once. On opening the door, however, it was discovered that another traveller had already deposited a great-coat and a rug in one corner.

"Give yourself no trouble, Captain Bramleigh," said the official in a low voice. "I'll just say the coupé is reserved, and we'll put him into another compartment. Take these traps, Bob," cried he to a porter, "and put them into a first-class."

Scarcely was the order given when two figures, moving out of the dark, approached, and one, with a slightly foreign accent, but in admirable English, said, "What are you doing there? I have taken that place."

"Yes," cried his friend, "this gentleman secured the coupé on the moment of his arrival."

"Very sorry, sir—extremely sorry; but the coupé was reserved—specially reserved."

"My friend has paid for that place," said the last speaker; "and I can only say, if I were he, I'd not relinquish it."

"Don't bother yourself about it," whispered Jack. "Let him have his place. I'll take the other corner; and there's an end of it."

"If you'll allow me, Captain Bramleigh," said the official, who was now touched to the quick on that sore point, a question of his department; "if you'll allow me, I think I can soon settle this matter."

"But I will not allow you, sir," said Jack, his sense of fairness already outraged by the whole procedure. "He has as good a right to his place as I have to mine. Many thanks for your trouble. Good-by." And so saying he stepped in.

The foreigner still lingered in earnest converse with his friend, and only mounted the steps as the train began to move. "A bientôt, cher Philippe," he cried, as the door was slammed, and the next instant they were gone.

The little incident which had preceded their departure had certainly not conduced to any amicable

disposition between them, and each, after a side-long glance at the other, ensconced himself more completely within his wrappings, and gave himself up to either silence or sleep.

Some thirty miles of the journey had rolled over, and it was now day,—dark and dreary indeed,—when Jack awoke and found the carriage pretty thick with smoke. There is a sort of freemasonry in the men of tobacco, which never fails them, and they have a kind of instinctive guess of a stranger from the mere character of his weed. On the present occasion Jack recognized a most exquisite Havanna odour, and turned furtively to see the smoker.

"I ought to have asked," said the stranger, "if this was disagreeable to you, but you were asleep, and I did not like to disturb you."

"Not in the least, I am a smoker too," said Jack, as he drew forth his case and proceeded to strike a light.

"Might I offer you one of mine?—they are not bad," said the other, proffering his case.

"Thanks," said Jack; "my tastes are too vulgar for Cubans. Birdseye, dashed with strong Cavendish, is what I like."

"I have tried that too, as I have tried everything English, but the same sort of half success follows me through all."

"If your knowledge of the language be the measure, I'd say you've not much to complain of. I almost doubt whether you are a foreigner."

"I was born in Italy," said the other cautiously, "and never in England till a few weeks ago."

"I'm afraid," said Jack, with a smile, "I did not impress you very favourably as regards British politeness, when we met this morning; but I was a little out of spirits. I was leaving home, not very likely to see it again for some time, and I wanted to be alone."

"I am greatly grieved not to have known this. I should never have thought of intruding."

"But there was no question of intruding. It was your right that you asserted, and no more."

"Half the harsh things that we see in life are done merely by asserting a right," said the other in a deep and serious voice.

Jack had little taste for what took the form of a reflection: to his apprehension, it was own brother of a sermon; and warned by this sample of his

companion's humour, he muttered a broken sort of assent and was silent. Little passed between them till they met at the dinner-table, and then they only interchanged a few commonplace remarks. On their reaching their destination, they took leave of each other courteously, but half formally, and drove off their several ways.

Almost the first man, however, that Jack met, as he stepped on board the mail-packet for Holyhead, was his fellow-traveller of the rail. This time they met cordially, and after a few words of greeting they proceeded to walk the deck together like old acquaintances.

Though the night was fresh and sharp there was a bright moon, and they both felt reluctant to go below, where a vast crowd of passengers was assembled. The brisk exercise, the invigorating air, and a certain congeniality that each discovered in the other, soon established between them one of those confidences which are only possible in early life. Nor do I know anything better in youth than the frank readiness with which such friendships are made. It is with no spirit of calculation—it is with no counting of the cost, that we sign these contracts.

We feel drawn into companionship, half by some void within ourselves, half by some quality that seems to supply that void. The tones of our own voice in our own ears assure us that we have found sympathy; for we feel that we are speaking in a way we could not speak to cold or uncongenial listeners.

When Jack Bramleigh had told that he was going to take command of a small gun-boat in the Mediterranean, he could not help going further, and telling with what a heavy heart he was going to assume his command. "We sailors have a hard lot of it," said he; "we come home after a cruise,—all is new, brilliant, and attractive to us. Our hearts are not steeled, as are landsmen's, by daily habit. We are intoxicated by what calmer heads scarcely feel excited. We fall in love; and then, some fine day, comes an Admiralty despatch ordering us to hunt slavers off Lagos, or fish for a lost cable in Behring's Straits."

"Never mind," said the other, "so long as there's a goal to reach, so long as there's a prize to win, all can be borne. It's only when life is a shoreless ocean,—when, seek where you will, no land will come in sight,—when, in fact, existence

offers nothing to speculate on,—then, indeed, the world is a dreary blank."

"I don't suppose any fellow's lot is as bad as that."

"Not perhaps completely, thoroughly so; but that a man's fate can approach such a condition,—that a man can cling to so small a hope that he is obliged to own to himself that it is next to no hope at all;—that there could be, and is, such a lot in existence, I who speak to you now am able unfortunately to vouch for."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Jack, feelingly; "and I am sorry, besides, to have obtruded my own small griefs before one who has such a heavy affliction."

"Remember," said the Frenchman, "I never said it was all up with me. I have a plank still to cling to, though it be only a plank. My case is simply this: I have come over to this country to prefer a claim to a large property, and I have nothing to sustain it but my right. I know well you Englishmen have a theory that your laws are so admirably and so purely administered that if a man asks for justice,—be he poor, or unknown, or

a foreigner, it matters not,—he is sure to obtain it. I like the theory, and I respect the man who believes in it, but I don't trust it myself. I remember reading in your debates how the House of Lords sat for days over a claim of a French nobleman who had been ruined by the great Revolution in France, and for whose aid, with others, a large sum had once been voted, of which, through a series of misadventures, not a shilling had reached him. That man's claim, upheld and maintained by one of the first men in England, and with an eloquence that thrilled through every heart around, was rejected, ay, rejected, and he was sent out of court a beggar. They couldn't call him impostor, but they left him to starve!" He paused for a second, and in a slower voice continued, "Now it may be that my case shall one of these days be heard before that tribunal, and I ask you does it not call for great courage and great trustfulness to have a hope on the issue?"

"I'll stake my head on it, they'll deal fairly by you," said Jack, stoutly.

"The poor baron I spoke of had powerful friends: men who liked him well, and fairly believed in his

claim. Now I am utterly unknown, and as devoid of friends as of money. I think nineteen out of twenty Englishmen would call me an adventurer to-morrow; and there are few titles that convey less respect in this grand country of yours."

"There you are right; every one here must have a place in society, and be in it."

"My landlady where I lodged thought me an adventurer; the tailor who measured me whispered adventurer as he went downstairs; and when a cab-man, in gratitude for an extra sixpence, called me 'count,' it was to proclaim me an adventurer to all who heard him."

"You are scarcely fair to us," said Jack, laughing. "You have been singularly unlucky in your English acquaintance."

"No. I have met a great deal of kindness, but always after a certain interval of doubt—almost of mistrust. I tell you frankly, you are the very first Englishman with whom I have ventured to talk freely on so slight an acquaintance, and it has been to me an unspeakable relief to do it."

"I am proud to think you had that confidence in me."

"You yourself suggested it. You began to tell me of your plans and hopes, and I could not resist the temptation to follow you. A French hussar is about as outspoken an animal as an English sailor, so that we were well met."

"Are you still in the service?"

"No; I am in what we call disponibilité. I am free till called on,—and free then if I feel unwilling to go back."

The Frenchman now passed on to speak of his life as a soldier,—a career so full of strange adventures and curious incidents that Jack was actually grieved when they glided into the harbour of Holyhead, and the steamer's bell broke up the narrative.

CHAPTER XX.

A MORNING OF PERPLEXITIES.

COLONEL BRAMLEIGH turned over and over, without breaking the seal, a letter which, bearing the post-mark of Rome and in a well-known hand, he knew came from Lady Augusta.

That second marriage of his had been a great mistake. None of the social advantages he had calculated on with such certainty had resulted from it. His wife's distinguished relatives had totally estranged themselves from her, as though she had made an unbecoming and unworthy alliance; his own sons and daughters had not concealed their animosity to their new stepmother; and, in fact, the best compromise the blunder admitted of was that they should try to see as little as possible of each other; and as they could not obliterate the compact, they should, as far as in them lay, endeavour to ignore it.

There are no more painful aids to a memory unwilling to be taxed than a banker's half-yearly statement; and in the long record which Christmas had summoned, and which now lay open before Bramleigh's eyes, were frequent and weighty reminders of Lady Augusta's expensive ways.

He had agreed to allow her a thousand napoleons —about eight hundred pounds—quarterly, which was, and which she owned was, a most liberal and sufficient sum to live on alone, and in a city comparatively cheap. He had, however, added, with a courtesy that the moment of parting might have suggested, "Whenever your tastes or your comforts are found to be hampered in any way by the limits I have set down, you will do me the favour to draw directly on 'the House,' and I will take care that your cheques shall be attended to."

The smile with which she thanked him was still in his memory. Since the memorable morning in Berkeley Square when she accepted his offer of marriage, he had seen nothing so fascinating— nor, let us add, so fleeting — as this gleam of enchantment. Very few days had sufficed to show him how much this meteor flash of loveliness had

cost him: and now, as he sat conning over a long line of figures, he bethought him that the second moment of witchery was very nearly as expensive as the first. When he made her that courteous offer of extending the limits of her civil list he had never contemplated how far she could have pushed his generosity, and now, to his amazement, he discovered that in a few months she had already drawn for seven thousand pounds, and had intimated to the House that the first instalment of the purchase-money of a villa would probably be required some time early in May; the business-like character of this "advice" being, however, sadly disparaged by her having totally forgotten to say anything as to the amount of the impending demand.

It was in a very unlucky moment—was there ever a lucky one? — when these heavy demands presented themselves. Colonel Bramleigh had latterly taken to what he thought, or at least meant to be, retrenchment. He was determined, as he said himself, to "take the bull by the horns:" but the men who perform this feat usually select a very small bull. He had nibbled, as it were, at the hem of the budget; he had cut down "the

boys'" allowances. "What could Temple want with five hundred a year? Her Majesty gave him four, and her Majesty certainly never intended to take his services without fitting remuneration. As to Jack having three hundred, it was downright absurdity: it was extravagances like these destroyed the Navy; besides, Jack had got his promotion, and his pay ought to be something handsome." With regard to Augustus, he only went so far as certain remonstrances about horse-keep and some hints about the iniquities of a German valet who, it was rumoured, had actually bought a house in Duke Street, St. James's, out of his peculations in the family.

The girls were not extravagantly provided for, but for example's sake he reduced their allowance by one-third. Ireland was not a country for embroidered silks or Genoa velvet. It would be an admirable lesson to others if they were to see the young ladies of the Great House dressed simply and unpretentiously. "These things could only be done by people of station. Such examples must proceed from those whose motives could not be questioned." He dismissed the head-gardener, and

he was actually contemplating the discharge of the French cook, though he well foresaw the storm of opposition so strong a measure was sure to evoke. When he came to sum up his reforms he was shocked to find that the total only reached a little over twelve hundred pounds, and this in a household of many thousands.

Was not Castello, too, a mistake? Was not all this princely style of living, in a county without a neighbourhood, totally unvisited by strangers, a capital blunder? He had often heard of the cheapness of life in Ireland; and what a myth it was! He might have lived in Norfolk for what he was spending in Downshire, and though he meant to do great things for the country, a doubt was beginning to steal over him as to how they were to be done. He had often insisted that absenteeism was the bane of Ireland, and yet for the life of him he could not see how his residence there was to prove a blessing.

Lady Augusta, with her separate establishment, was spending above three thousand a year. Poor man, he was grumbling to himself over this, when that precious document from the bank arrived with

the astounding news of her immense extravagance. He laid her letter down again: he had not temper to read it. It was so sure to be one of those frivolous little levities which jar so painfully on serious feelings. He knew so well the half jestful excuses she would make for her wastefulness, the coquettish prettinesses she would deploy in describing her daily life of mock simplicity, and utter recklessness as to cost, that he muttered "Not now" to himself as he pushed the letter away. As he did so he discovered a letter in the hand of Mr. Sedley, his law agent. He had himself written a short note to that gentleman, at Jack's request; for Jack—who, like all sailors, believed in a First Lord and implicitly felt that no promotion ever came rightfully—wanted a special introduction to the great men at Somerset House, a service which Sedley, who knew every one, could easily render him. This note of Sedley's then doubtless referred to that matter, and though Bramleigh did not feel any great or warm interest in the question, he broke the envelope to read it rather as a relief than otherwise. It was at least a new topic, and it could not be a very exciting one. The letter ran thus:—

"Tuesday, January 15.

"My dear Sir,

"Hicklay will speak to the First Lord at the earliest convenient moment, but as Captain Bramleigh has just got his promotion, he does not see what can be done in addition. I do not suppose your son would like a dockyard appointment, but a tolerably snug berth will soon be vacant at Malta, and as Captain B. will be in town to-morrow, I shall wait upon him early, and learn his wishes in the matter. There is great talk to-day of changes in the Cabinet, and some rumour of a dissolution. These reports and disquieting news from France have brought the Funds down one-sixth. Burrows and Black have failed—the Calcutta house had made some large tea speculation, it is said, without the knowledge of the partners here. At all events, the liabilities will exceed a million; available assets not a hundred thousand. I hope you will not suffer, or if so, to only a trifling extent, as I know you lately declined the advances Black so pressed upon you,"

"He's right there," muttered Bramleigh. "I wouldn't touch those indigo bonds. When old Grant began to back up the natives, I saw what

would become of the planters. All meddling with the labour market in India is mere gambling, and whenever a man makes his coup he ought to go off with his money. What's all this here," muttered he, "about Talookdars and Ryots? He ought to know this question cannot interest me."

"I met Kelson yesterday; he was very close and guarded, but my impression is that they are doing nothing in the affair of the 'Pretender.' I hinted jocularly something about having a few thousands by me if he should happen to know of a good investment, and, in the same careless way, he replied, 'I'll drop in some morning at the office, and have a talk with you.' There was a significance in his manner that gave me to believe he meant a 'transaction.' We shall see. I shall add a few lines to this after I have seen Captain B. to-morrow. I must now hurry off to Westminster."

Bramleigh turned over, and read the following:—

Wednesday, 16th.

"On going to the 'Drummond' this morning to breakfast, by appointment, with your son, I found him dressing, but talking with the occupant of a room on the opposite side of the sitting-room, where

breakfast was laid for three. Captain B., who seemed in excellent health and spirits, entered freely on the subject of the shore appointment, and when I suggested caution in discussing it, told me there was no need of reserve, that he could say what he pleased before his friend—'whom, by the way,' said he, 'I am anxious to make known to you. You are the very man to give him first-rate advice, and if you cannot take up his case yourself, to recommend him to some one of trust and character.' While we were talking, the stranger entered—a young man, short, good-looking, and of good address. 'I want to present you to Mr. Sedley,' said Captain B., 'and I'll be shot if I don't forget your name.'

"'I half doubt if you ever knew it,' said the other, laughing; and, turning to me, added, 'Our friendship is of short date. We met as travellers, but I have seen enough of life to know that the instinct that draws men towards each other is no bad guarantee for mutual liking.' He said this with a slightly foreign accent, but fluently and easily.

"We now sat down to table, and though not being gifted with that expansiveness that the stranger spoke of, I soon found myself listening with

pleasure to the conversation of a very shrewd and witty man, who had seen a good deal of life. Perhaps I may have exhibited some trait of the pleasure he afforded me—perhaps I may have expressed it in words; at all events your son marked the effect produced upon me, and in a tone of half jocular triumph, cried out, 'Eh, Sedley, you'll stand by him —won't you? I've told him if there was a man in England to carry him through a stiff campaign you were the fellow.' I replied by some commonplace, and rose soon after to proceed to Court. As the foreigner had also some business at the Hall, I offered him a seat in my cab. As we went along, he spoke freely of himself and his former life, and gave me his card, with the name 'Anatole Pracontal,'— one of the aliases of our Pretender. So that here I was for two hours in close confab with the enemy, to whom I was actually presented by your own son! So overwhelming was this announcement that I really felt unable to take any course, and doubted whether I ought not at once to have told him who his fellow-traveller was. I decided at last for the more cautious line, and asked him to come and see me at Fulham. We parted excellent friends.

Whether he will keep his appointment or not I am unable to guess. By a special good fortune—so I certainly must deem it—Captain Bramleigh was telegraphed for to Portsmouth, and had to leave town at once. So that any risks from that quarter are avoided. Whether this strange meeting will turn out well or ill, whether it will be misinterpreted by Kelson when he comes to hear it—for it would be hard to believe it all accident—and induce him to treat us with distrust and suspicion, or whether it may conduce to a speedy settlement of everything, is more than I can yet say.

"I am so far favourably impressed by M. Pracontal's manner and address that I think he ought not to be one difficult to deal with. What may be his impression, however, when he learns with whom he has been talking so freely, is still doubtful to me. He cannot, it is true, mistrust your son, but he may feel grave doubts about *me*.

"I own I do not expect to see him to-morrow. Kelson will certainly advise him against such a step, nor do I yet perceive what immediate good would result from our meeting, beyond the assuring him—as I certainly should—that all that had occurred was

pure chance, and that, though perfectly familiar with his name and his pretensions, I had not the vaguest suspicion of his identity till I read his card. It may be that out of this strange blunder good may come. Let us hope it. I will write to-morrow.

"Truly yours,

"M. SEDLEY."

Colonel Bramleigh re-read every line of the letter carefully; and as he laid it down with a sigh, said, "What a complication of troubles on my hands. At the very moment that I am making engagements to relieve others, I may not have the means to meet my own difficulties. Sedley was quite wrong to make any advances to this man; they are sure to be misinterpreted. Kelson will think we are afraid, and raise his terms with us accordingly." Again his eyes fell upon Lady Augusta's letter; but he had no temper now to encounter all the light gossip and frivolity it was sure to contain. He placed it in his pocket, and set out to take a walk. He wanted to think, but he also wanted the spring and energy which come of brisk exercise. He felt his mind would work more freely when he was in motion; and in the open air, too, he should escape from the

terrible oppression of being continually confronted by himself,—which he felt while he was in the solitude of his study.

"If M. Pracontal measure us by the standard of Master Jack," muttered he, bitterly, "he will opine that the conflict ought not to be a tough one. What fools these sailors are when you take them off their own element; and what a little bit of a world is the quarter-deck of a frigate! Providence has not blessed me with brilliant sons; that is certain. It was through Temple we have come to know Lord Culduff; and I protest I anticipate little of either profit or pleasure from the acquaintanceship. As for Augustus, he is only so much shrewder than the others, that he is more cautious; his selfishness is immensely preservative." This was not, it must be owned, a flattering estimate that he made of his sons; but he was a man to tell hard truths to himself; and to tell them roughly and roundly too, like one who, when he had to meet a difficulty in life, would rather confront it in its boldest shape.

So essentially realistic was the man's mind that, till he had actually under his eyes these few lines describing Pracontal's look and manner, he had never

been able to convince himself that this pretender was an actual *bonâ fide* creature. Up to this, the claim had been a vague menace, and no more; a tradition that ended in a threat! There was the whole of it! Kelson had written to Sedley, and Sedley to Kelson. There had been a half-amicable contest, a sort of round with the gloves, in which these two crafty men appeared rather like great moralists than cunning lawyers. Had they been peace-makers by Act of Parliament, they could not have urged more strenuously the advantages of amity and kindliness; how severely they censured the contentious spirit which drove men into litigation! and how beautifully they showed the Christian benefit of an arbitration "under the court," the costs to be equitably divided!

Throughout the whole drama, however, M. Pracontal had never figured as an active character of the piece; and for all that Bramleigh could see, the machinery might work to the end, and the catastrophe be announced, not only without even producing him, but actually without his having ever existed. If from time to time he might chance to read in the public papers of a suspicious foreigner, a "Frenchman or Italian of fashionable appearance," having

done this, that, or t'other, he would ask himself at once, "I wonder could that be *my* man? Is that the adventurer who wants to replace me here?" As time, however, rolled on, and nothing came of this claim more palpable than a dropping letter from Sedley, to say he had submitted such a point to counsel, or he thought that the enemy seemed disposed to come to terms, Bramleigh actually began to regard the whole subject as a man might the danger of a storm, which, breaking afar off, might probably waste all its fury before it reached him.

Now, however, these feelings of vague, undefined doubt were to give way to a very palpable terror. His own son had seen Pracontal, and sat at table with him. Pracontal was a good-looking, well-mannered fellow, with, doubtless, all the readiness and the aplomb of a clever foreigner; not a creature of mean appearance and poverty-struck aspect, whose very person would disparage his pretensions, but a man with the bearing of the world and the habits of society.

So sudden and so complete was this revulsion, and so positively did it depict before him an actual conflict, that he could only think of how to deal with

Pracontal personally, by what steps it might be safest to approach him, and how to treat a man whose changeful fortunes must doubtless have made him expert in difficulties, and at the same time a not unlikely dupe to well-devised and well-applied flatteries.

To have invited him frankly to Castello,—to have assumed that it was a case in which a generous spirit might deal far more successfully than all the cavils and cranks of the law, was Bramleigh's first thought; but to do this with effect, he must confide the whole story of the peril to some at least of the family: and this, for many reasons, he could not stoop to. Bramleigh certainly attached no actual weight to this man's claim,—he did not in his heart believe that there was any foundation for his pretension; but Sedley had told him that there was case enough to go to a jury,—and a jury meant exposure, publicity, comment, and very unpleasant comment too, when party hatred should contribute its venom to the discussion. If, then, he shrunk from imparting this story to his sons and daughters, how long could he count on secrecy ?—only till next assizes perhaps. At the first notice of trial the whole mischief would

be out, and the matter be a world-wide scandal. Sedley advised a compromise, but the time was very unpropitious for this. It was downright impossible to get money at the moment. Every one was bent on "realizing," in presence of all the crashes and bankruptcies around. None would lend on the best securities, and men were selling out at ruinous loss to meet pressing engagements. For the very first time in his life, Bramleigh felt what it was to want for ready money. He had every imaginable kind of wealth. Houses and lands, stocks, shares, ships, costly deposits and mortgages—everything in short but gold: and yet it was gold alone could meet the emergency. How foolish it was of him to involve himself in Lord Culduff's difficulties at such a crisis: had he not troubles enough of his own! Would that essenced and enamelled old dandy have stained his boots to have served *him?* That was a very unpleasant query, which would cross his mind, and never obtain anything like a satisfactory reply. Would not his calculation probably be that Bramleigh was amply recompensed for all he could do, by the honour of being deemed the friend of a noble lord, so highly placed, and so much thought of in the world.

As for Lady Augusta's extravagance, it was simply insufferable. He had been most liberal to her because he would not permit that whatever might be the nature of the differences that separated them, money in any shape should enter. There must be nothing sordid or mean in the tone of any discussion between them. She might prefer Italy to Ireland; sunshine to rain, a society of idle, leisure-loving, indolent, soft-voiced men, to association with sterner, severer, and more energetic natures. She might affect to think climate all essential to her; and the society of her sister a positive necessity. All these he might submit to, but he was neither prepared to be ruined by her wastefulness, nor maintain a controversy as to the sum she should spend. "If we come to figures, it must be a fight," muttered he, "and an ignoble fight too; and it is to that we are now approaching."

"I think I can guess what is before me here," said he with a grim smile, as he tore open the letter and prepared to read it. Now, though on this occasion his guess was not exactly correct, nor did the epistle contain the graceful little nothings by which her ladyship was wont to chronicle her daily

life, we forbear to give it in extenso to our readers; first of all, because it opened with a very long and intricate explanation of motives which was no explanation at all, and then proceeded by an equally prolix narrative to announce a determination which was only to be final on approval. In two words, Lady Augusta was desirous of changing her religion; but before becoming a Catholic, she wished to know if Colonel Bramleigh would make a full and irrevocable settlement on her of her present allowance, giving her entire power over its ultimate disposal, for she hinted that the sum might be capitalized; the recompence for such splendid generosity being the noble consciousness of a very grand action, and his own liberty. To the latter she adverted with becoming delicacy, slyly hinting that in the church to which he belonged there might probably be no very strenuous objections made, should he desire to contract new ties, and once more re-enter the bonds of matrimony.

The expression which burst aloud from Bramleigh as he finished the letter, conveyed all that he felt on the subject.

"What outrageous effrontery! The first part of

this precious document is written by a priest, and the second by an attorney. It begins by informing me that I am a heretic, and politely asks me to add to that distinction the honour of being a beggar. What a woman! I have done, I suppose, a great many foolish things in life, but I shall not cap them so far, I promise you, Lady Augusta, by an endowment of the Catholic Church. No, my lady, you shall give the new faith you are about to adopt the most signal proof of your sincerity, by renouncing all worldliness at the threshold; and as the nuns cut off their silken tresses, you shall rid yourself of that wealth which we are told is such a barrier against heaven. Far be it from me," said he with a sardonic bitterness, "who have done so little for your happiness here, to peril your welfare hereafter."

"I will answer this at once," said he. "It shall not remain one post without its reply."

He arose to return to the house; but in his pre-occupation he continued to walk till he reached the brow of the cliff from which the roof of the curate's cottage was seen, about a mile off. The peaceful stillness of the scene, where not a leaf moved, and where the sea washed lazily along the

low strand with a sweeping motion that gave no sound, calmed and soothed him. Was it not to taste that sweet sense of repose that he had quitted the busy life of cities and come to this lone sequestered spot? Was not this very moment, as he now felt it, the realization of a long-cherished desire? Had the world anything better in all its prizes, he asked himself, than the peaceful enjoyment of an unchequered existence? Shall I not try to carry out what once I had planned to myself, and live my life as I intended?

He sat down on the brow of the crag and looked out over the sea. A gentle, but not unpleasant sadness was creeping over him. It was one of those moments—every man has had them—in which the vanity of life and the frivolity of all its ambitions present themselves to the mind far more forcibly than ever they appear when urged from the pulpit. There is no pathos, no bad taste, no inflated description in the workings of reflectiveness. When we come to compute with ourselves what we have gained by our worldly successes, and to make a total of all our triumphs, we arrive at a truer insight into the nothingness of what we are contending for, than we

ever attain through the teaching of our professional moralists.

Colonel Bramleigh had made considerable progress along this peaceful track since he sat down there. Could he only be sure to accept the truths he had been repeating to himself without any wavering or uncertainty; could he have resolution enough to conform his life to these convictions,—throw over all ambitions, and be satisfied with mere happiness,—was this prize not within his reach? Temple and Marion, perhaps, might resist; but he was certain the others would agree with him. While he thus pondered, he heard the low murmur of voices, apparently near him; he listened, and perceived that some persons were talking as they mounted the zigzag path which led up from the bottom of the gorge, and which had to cross and recross continually before it gained the summit. A thick hedge of laurel and arbutus fenced the path on either side so completely as to shut out all view of those who were walking along it, and who had to pass and repass quite close to where Bramleigh was sitting.

To his intense astonishment it was in French

they spoke; and a certain sense of terror came over him as to what this might portend. Were these spies of the enemy, and was the mine about to be sprung beneath him? One was a female voice, a clear, distinct voice—which he thought he knew well, and oh, what inexpressible relief to his anxiety was it when he recognized it to be Julia L'Estrange's. She spoke volubly, almost flippantly, and, as it seemed to Bramleigh, in a tone of half sarcastic raillery, against which her companion appeared to protest, as he more than once repeated the word "*sérieuse*," in a tone almost reproachful.

"If I am to be serious, my lord," said she, in a more collected tone, "I had better get back to English. Let me tell you then, in a language which admits of little misconception, that I have forborne to treat your lordship's proposal with gravity, partly out of respect for myself, partly out of deference to you."

"Deference to me? What do you mean? what can you mean?"

"I mean, my lord, that all the flattery of being the object of your lordship's choice could not obliterate my sense of a disparity, just as great between us

in years as in condition. I was nineteen my last birthday, Lord Culduff;" and she said this with a pouting air of offended dignity.

"A peeress of nineteen would be a great success at a drawing-room," said he, with a tone of pompous deliberation.

"Pray, my lord, let us quit a theme we cannot agree upon. With all your lordship's delicacy, you have not been able to conceal the vast sacrifices it has cost you to make me your present proposal. I have no such tact. I have not even the shadow of it; and I could never hope to hide what it would cost me to become grande dame."

"A proposal of marriage; an actual proposal," muttered Bramleigh, as he arose to move away. "I heard it with my own ears; and heard her refuse it, besides."

An hour later, when he mounted the steps of the chief entrance, he met Marion, who came towards him with an open letter. "This is from poor Lord Culduff," said she; "he has been stopping these last three days at the L'Estranges', and what between boredom and bad cookery he couldn't hold out any longer. He begs he may be permitted to come back

here; he says, 'Put me below the salt, if you like —anywhere, only let it be beneath your roof, and within the circle of your fascinating society.' Shall I say Come, papa?"

"I suppose we must," muttered Bramleigh, sulkily, and passed on to his room.

CHAPTER XXI.

GEORGE AND JULIA.

It was after a hard day with the hounds that George L'Estrange reached the cottage to a late dinner. The hunting had not been good. They had found three times, but each time lost their fox after a short burst, and though the morning broke favourably, with a low cloudy sky and all the signs of a good scenting day, towards the afternoon a brisk north-easter had sprung up, making the air sharp and piercing, and rendering the dogs wild and uncertain. In fact, it was one of those days which occasionally irritate men more than actual "blanks;" there was a constant promise of something, always ending in disappointment. The horses, too, were fretful and impatient, as horses are wont to be with frequent checks, and when excited by a cold and cutting wind.

Even Nora, perfection that she was of temper and training, had not behaved well. She had taken her fences hotly and impatiently, and actually chested a stiff bank, which cost herself and her rider a heavy fall, and a disgrace that the curate felt more acutely than the injury.

"You don't mean to say you fell, George?" said Julia, with a look of positive incredulity.

"Nora did, which comes pretty much to the same thing. We were coming out of Gore's Wood, and I was leading. There's a high bank with a drop into Longworth's lawn. It's a place I have taken scores of times. One can't fly it; you must 'top,' and Nora can do that sort of thing to perfection; and as I came on I had to swerve a little to avoid some of the dogs that were climbing up the bank. Perhaps it was that irritated her, but she rushed madly on, and came full chest against the gripe, and——I don't remember much more till I found myself actually drenched with vinegar that old Catty Lalor was pouring over me, when I got up again, addled and confused enough, but I'm all right now. Do you know, Ju," said he, after a pause, "I was more annoyed by a chance remark

I heard as I was lying on the grass than by the whole misadventure?"

"What was it, George?"

"It was old Curtis was riding by, and he cried out, 'Who's down?' and some one said, 'L'Estrange.' 'By Jove,' said he, 'I don't think that fellow was ever on his knees before;' and this because I was a parson."

"How unfeeling; but how like him!"

"Wasn't it? After all, it comes of doing what is not exactly right. I suppose it's not enough that I see nothing wrong in a day with the hounds. I ought to think how others regard it; whether it shocks *them*, or exposes my cloth to sarcasm or censure? Is it not dinner-hour?"

"Of course it is, George. It's past eight."

"And where's our illustrious guest; has he not appeared?"

"Lord Culduff has gone. There came a note to him from Castello in the afternoon, and about five o'clock the phaeton appeared at the door—only with the servants—and his lordship took a most affectionate leave of me, charging me with the very sweetest messages for you, and assurances of eter-

nal memory of the blissful hours he had passed here."

"Perhaps it's not the right thing to say, but I own to you I'm glad he's gone."

"But why, George; was he not amusing?"

"Yes; I suppose he was; but he was so supremely arrogant, so impressed with his own grandness and our littleness, so persistently eager to show us that we were enjoying an honour in his presence, that nothing in our lives could entitle us to, that I found my patience pushed very hard to endure it."

"I liked him. I liked his vanity and conceit; and I wouldn't for anything he had been less pretentious."

"I have none of your humoristic temperament, Julia, and I never could derive amusement from the eccentricities or peculiarities of others."

"And there's no fun like it, George. Once that you come to look on life as a great drama, and all the men and women as players, it's the best comedy ever one sat at."

"I'm glad he's gone for another reason, too. I suppose it's shabby to say it, but it's true all

the same: he was a very costly guest, and I wasn't disposed, like Charles the Bold or that other famous fellow, to sell a province to entertain an emperor."

"Had we a province to sell, George?" said she, laughing.

"No; but I had a horse, and unfortunately Nora must go to the hammer now."

"Surely not for this week's extravagance?" cried she, anxiously.

"Not exactly for this, but for everything. You know old Curtis's saying, 'It's always the last glass of wine makes a man tipsy.' But here comes the dinner, and let us turn to something pleasanter."

It was so jolly to be alone again, all restraint removed, all terror of culinary mishaps withdrawn, and all the consciousness of little domestic shortcomings obliterated, that L'Estrange's spirit rose at every moment, and at last he burst out, "I declare to you, Julia, if that man hadn't gone, I'd have died out of pure inanition. To see him day after day trying to conform to our humble fare, turning over his meat on his plate, and trying to divide with his

fork the cutlet that he wouldn't condescend to cut, and barely able to suppress the shudder our little light wine gave him; to witness all this, and to feel that I mustn't seem to know, while I was fully aware of it, was a downright misery. I'd like to know what brought him here."

"I fancy he couldn't tell you himself. He paid an interminable visit, and we asked him to stop and dine with us. A wet night detained him, and when his servant came over with his dressing-bag or portmanteau, you said, or I said,—I forget which, that he ought not to leave us without a peep at our coast scenery."

"I remember all that; but what I meant was, that his coming here from Castello was no accident. He never left a French cook and Château Lafite for cold mutton and sour sherry without some reason for it."

"You forget, George, he was on his way to Lisconnor when he came here. He was going to visit the mines."

"By the by, that reminds me of a letter I got this evening. I put it in my pocket without reading. Isn't that Vickars' hand?"

"Yes; it is his reply, perhaps, to my letter. He is too correct and too prudent to write to myself, and sends the answer to you."

"As our distinguished guest is not here to be shocked, Julia, let us hear what Vickars says."

"'My dear Mr. L'Estrange, I have before me a letter from your sister, expressing a wish that I should consent to the withdrawal of the sum of two thousand pounds, now vested in consols under my trusteeship, and employ these moneys in a certain enterprise which she designates as the coal-mines of Lisconnor. Before acceding to the grave responsibility which this change of investment would impose upon me, even supposing that the 'Master,'—who is the Master, George?"

"Go on; read further," said he, curtly.

"'—that the Master would concur with such a procedure, I am desirous of hearing what you yourself know of the speculation in question. Have you seen and conversed with the engineers who have made the surveys? Have you heard from competent and unconcerned parties——?' Oh, George, it's so like the way he talks. I can't read on."

L'Estrange took the letter from her and glanced rapidly over the lines, and then turning to the last page read aloud: "'How will the recommendation of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners affect you touching the union of Portshannon with Kilmullock? Do they simply extinguish you, or have you a claim for compensation?'"

"What does he mean, George?" cried she, as she gazed at the pale face and agitated expression of her brother as he laid down the letter before her.

"It is just extinguishment; that's the word for it," muttered he. "When they unite the parishes, they suppress me."

"Oh, George, don't say that; it has not surely come to this?"

"There's no help for it," said he, putting away his glass and leaning his head on his hand. "I was often told they'd do something like this; and when Grimsby was here to examine the books and make notes,—you remember it was a wet Sunday, and nobody came but the clerk's mother,—he said, as we left the church, 'The congregation is orderly and attentive, but not numerous.'"

"I told you, George, I detested that man. I said at the time he was no friend to *you*."

"If he felt it his duty——"

"Duty, indeed! I never heard of a cruelty yet that hadn't the plea of a duty. I'm sure Captain Craufurd comes to church, and Mrs. Bayley comes, and as to the Great House, there's a family there of not less than thirty persons."

"When Grimsby was here Castello was not occupied."

"Well, it is occupied now; and if Colonel Bramleigh be a person of the influence he assumes to be, and if he cares,—as I take it he must care,—not to live like a heathen, he'll prevent this cruel wrong. I'm not sure that Nelly has much weight, but she would do anything in the world for us, and I think Augustus, too, would befriend us."

"What can they all do? It's a question for the Commissioners."

"So it may; but I take it the Commissioners are human beings."

He turned again to the letter which lay open on the table, and read aloud, "'They want a chaplain,

I see, at Albano, near Rome. Do you know any one who could assist you to the appointment, always providing that you would like it.' I should think I would like it."

"You were thinking of the glorious riding over the Campagna, George, that you told me about long ago?"

"I hope not," said he, blushing deeply, and looking overwhelmed with confusion.

"Well, *I* was, George. Albano reminded me at once of those long moonlight canters you told me about, with the grand old city in the distance. I almost fancy I have seen it all. Let us bethink us of the great people we know, and who would aid us in the matter."

"The list begins and ends with the Lord Culduff, I suspect."

"Not at all. It is the Bramleighs can be of use here. Lady Augusta lives at Rome; she must be, I'm sure, a person of influence there, and be well known too, and know all the English of station. It's a downright piece of good fortune for us she should be there. There now, be of good heart, and don't look wretched. We'll drive over to Castello to-morrow."

"They've been very cool towards us of late."

"As much our fault as theirs, George; some, certainly, was my own."

"Oh, Vickars has heard of her. He says here, 'Is the Lady Augusta Bramleigh, who has a villa at Albano, any relative of your neighbour Colonel Bramleigh? She is very eccentric, some say mad: but she does what she likes with every one. Try and procure a letter to her.'"

"It's all as well as settled, George. We'll be cantering over that swelling prairie before the spring ends," said she. Quietly rising and going over to the piano, she began one of those little popular Italian ballads which they call "Stornelli"—those light effusions of national life which blend up love and flowers and sunshine together so pleasantly, and seem to emblematize the people who sing them.

"Thither! oh, thither! George! as the girl sings in Goethe's ballad. Won't it be delightful?"

"First let us see if it be possible."

And then they began one of those discussions of ways and means which, however, as we grow old in life, are tinged with all the hard and stern characters of sordid self-interest, are, in our younger

days, blended so thoroughly with hope and trustfulness that they are amongst the most attractive of all the themes we can turn to. There were so many things to be done, and so little to do them with, that it was marvellous to hear of the cunning and ingenious devices by which poverty was to be cheated out of its meanness and actually imagine itself picturesque. George was not a very imaginacive creature, but it was strange to see to what flights he rose as the sportive fancy of the high-spirited girl carried him away to the region of the speculative and the hopeful.

"It's just as well, after all, perhaps," said he, after some moments of thought, "that we had not invested your money in the mine."

"Of course, George, we shall want it to buy vines and orange-trees. Oh, I shall grow mad with impatience if I talk of this much longer! Do you know," said she, in a more collected and serious tone, "I have just built a little villa on the lake-side of Albano? And I'm doubting whether I'll have my 'pergolato' of vines next the water or facing the mountain. I incline to the mountain."

"We mustn't dream of building," said he, gravely.

"We must dream of everything, George. It is in dreamland I am going to live. Why is this gift of fancy bestowed upon us if not to conjure up allies that will help us to fight the stern evils of life? Without imagination, Hope is a poor, weary, plodding foot-traveller, painfully lagging behind us. Give him but speculation, and he soars aloft on wings and rises towards heaven."

"Do be reasonable, Julia; and let us decide what steps we shall take."

"Let me just finish my boat-house: I'm putting an aviary on the top of it. Well, don't look so pitifully; I am not going mad. Now, then, for the practical. We are to go over to Castello to-morrow early, I suppose?"

"Yes; I should say in the morning, before Colonel Bramleigh goes into his study. After that he dislikes being disturbed. I mean to speak to him myself. You must address yourself to Marion."

"The forlorn hope always falls to my share," said she, poutingly. "Why, you were the best friends in the world till a few days back! You men can understand nothing of these things. You neither

know the nice conditions nor the delicate reserves of young lady friendships; nor have you the slightest conception of how boundless we can be in admiration of each other in the imagined consciousness of something very superior in ourselves, and which makes all our love a very generous impulse. There is so much coarseness in male friendships, that you understand none of these subtle distinctions."

"I was going to say, thank heaven, we don't."

"You are grateful for very little, George. I assure you there is a great charm in these fine affinities, and remember you men are not necessarily always rivals. Your roads in life are so numerous and so varied, that you need not jostle. We women have but one path, and one goal at the end of it; and there is no small generosity in the kindliness we extend to each other."

They talked away late into the night of the future. Once or twice the thought flashed across Julia whether she ought not to tell of what had passed between Lord Culduff and herself. She was not quite sure but that George ought to hear it; but then a sense of delicacy restrained her—a delicacy that extended to that old man who had

made her the offer of his hand, and who would not for worlds have it known that his offer had been rejected. No, thought she, his secret shall be respected. As he deemed me worthy to be his wife, he shall know that so far as regards respect for his feelings he had not over-estimated me.

It was all essential, however, that her brother should not think of enlisting Lord Culduff in his cause, or asking his lordship's aid or influence in any way; and when L'Estrange carelessly said, "Could not our distinguished friend and guest be of use here?" she hastened to reply, "Do not think of that, George. These men are so victimized by appeals of this sort that they either flatly refuse their assistance, or give some flippant promise of an aid they never think of according. It would actually fret me, if I thought we were to owe anything to such intervention. In fact," said she, laughingly, "it's quite an honour to be his acquaintance. It would be something very like a humiliation to have him for a friend. And now good-night. You won't believe it, perhaps; but it wants but a few minutes to two o'clock."

"People, I believe, never go to bed in Italy,"

said he, yawning; "or only in the day-time. So that we are in training already, Julia."

"How I hope the match may come off," said she, as she gave him her hand at parting. "I'll go and dream over it."

END OF VOL. I.

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